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THESIS

INTRACTABILITY AND MEDIATION OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

by

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December 2013

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**INTRACTABILITY AND MEDIATION OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH
CONFLICT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

Nearly two decades following a ceasefire, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh remains unresolved. Often referred to as a frozen conflict, the status quo that has developed between these two nations has developed roots that touch many aspects of life in both countries.

This thesis examines intractability by analyzing three distinct levels of this conflict. It scrutinizes the reasons underlying failed mediation attempts since 1994 at the level of the elite, the nation, and the international structure. It also explores the linkages between these three distinct levels that contribute to the complexity of conflict resolution.

Despite periodic optimistic media reports that suggest mediators are nearing a final resolution, it will likely be decades before real progress can be made. Resolution of this conflict will require a compromise between these two nations that may only be possible through greater democratization on both sides. Simultaneously, the influence of larger states, notably Russia, have placed this regional dispute on the global stage and embedded the conflict in a larger polarized geopolitical contest for power and influence. Effective mediation depends on a shift in the regional balance of power or national interests of regional stakeholders.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION.....	1
B.	IMPORTANCE.....	1
C.	PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES	2
D.	LITERATURE REVIEW	5
E.	METHODS AND SOURCES	10
F.	THESIS OVERVIEW	10
II.	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	13
A.	LEVELS-OF-ANALYSIS APPROACH.....	14
1.	The Level of the Individual	14
2.	The Level of the Nation	15
3.	The Level of the International System	16
B.	INTRACTABLE CONFLICT	19
C.	MEDIATION.....	20
D.	MULTIPLE MEDIATORS	22
E.	LEVERAGE AND CONFLICTING INTERESTS	23
F.	CONCLUSION	25
III.	HISTORY OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT	27
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	27
B.	HISTORICAL HOMELAND	28
C.	CONFLICT IS BORN	29
D.	STATEHOOD	31
E.	THE CONFLICT OVER KARABAKH EMERGES.....	33
F.	AZERBAIJAN ASSERTS CONTROL	34
G.	ARMENIAN REBELLION / SOVIET INVASION	35
H.	SOVIETS EXPAND AS WORLD WAR I ENDS.....	36
I.	THE BORDER COMMISSION DELIBERATES ON KARABAKH.....	37
J.	THE CAUCASUS BUREAU DECISION ON KARABAKH	38
K.	THE DORMANT CONFLICT IS REBORN.....	38
L.	VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN SUMGAI AND ECHOES THROUGHOUT BOTH REPUBLICS.....	39
M.	EARTHQUAKE DEVASTATES ARMENIA AND RUSSIA FACES THE ETHNIC PROBLEM.....	40
N.	THE CONFLICT BECOMES POLITICAL AND INCREASINGLY MILITARISTIC.....	41
O.	OPERATION RING	43
P.	MEDIATION IS ATTEMPTED WHILE THE SOVIET UNION COLLAPSES.....	44
Q.	THE SOVIET UNION FALLS AND FULL SCALE WAR ERUPTS	45
R.	DOMESTIC POLITICAL UNREST BEGINS IN BAKU	45

S.	IRANIAN CEASEFIRE COLLAPSES / ARMENIANS TAKE SHUSHA	46
T.	INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS HEIGHTEN	47
U.	AZERBAIJAN LAUNCHES COUNTER-OFFENSIVE AS CSCE FORMS MINSK GROUP	47
V.	KARABAKH ARMENIANS RESTRUCTURE FORCES AND PUSH OUTSIDE OF KARABAKH	48
W.	INTERNATIONAL OUTRAGE TO ARMENIAN AGGRESSION	49
X.	ANOTHER ATTEMPT AT PEACE AMID DOMESTIC TURMOIL IN AZERBAIJAN	50
Y.	ARMENIANS ADVANCE CREATES GREATER HUMANITARIAN DISASTER.....	51
Z.	AZERBAIJAN TAKES A FINAL STAND	52
AA.	CEASEFIRE.....	54
BB.	SUCCESS OF RUSSIAN MEDIATION	54
CC.	CONCLUSION	55
IV.	CONFLICT AT THE LEVEL OF THE ELITE AND THE NATION	59
A.	ETHNIC CONSOLIDATION	59
B.	THE SOCIAL BURDEN OF CONFLICT: ALTERING THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE.....	61
C.	THE RISE OF COMPETITIVE ETHNO-POLITICS	63
D.	EFFECTS OF THE STATUS QUO.....	68
E.	THE PROSPECT OF PEACE THROUGH ECONOMIC INTEGRATION.....	73
F.	INFORMAL DIPLOMACY: ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL NETWORKING	75
G.	THE ROLE OF DEMOCRACY	80
H.	CONCLUSION	84
V.	CONFLICT AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL.....	87
A.	MEDIATION: DOES THE APPROACH MATTER?.....	88
B.	UNITED STATES.....	90
C.	TURKEY	94
D.	IRAN	97
E.	RUSSIA.....	102
F.	BARRIERS TO MEDIATION	110
G.	CONCLUSION	111
VI.	CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING INTRACTABILITY AND CHARTING A COURSE TO RESOLUTION.....	115
APPENDIX	REGIONAL MAPS	123
LIST OF REFERENCES	125
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	135

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Diagram of linkages between levels of analysis	117
Figure 2.	Map of Nagorno-Karabakh	123
Figure 3.	Map of South Caucasus	124

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Facebook poll: “What is the most effective solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?”	79
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIOC	Azerbaijan International Operating Company
ANM	Armenian National Movement
BTC	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (Pipeline/Company)
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
DCFTA	deep and comprehensive free trade area
GDP	gross domestic product
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-governmental organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh ended in a ceasefire in May 1994, after six years of fighting and more than two years of full-fledged warfare. Third party mediation followed, but provided no final resolution. Over the last 19 years, there have been numerous attempts at mediation wherein the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has taken the lead. In nearly two decades, there has been no substantial progress. Moreover, there are indications that both parties have grown more determined to return to violence. This paper investigates the factors underlying failed mediation and explores what might be done differently.

B. IMPORTANCE

The South Caucasus is a region mired in conflict, yet it holds strategic significance to both regional and global powers. It is a common link among diverging interests. It provides a vital source of energy to Europe and a strategic military foothold for Moscow. To the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), it serves as a link in the northern distribution network and borders Iran, a nation considered a security threat to the United States and its allies.¹ Escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict may impinge on the aforementioned interests of third parties, but a renewed hostility may have even more severe implications. If war again broke out in Nagorno-Karabakh, it is unlikely that it would remain a limited regional conflict. In recent years, an arms race has developed between Armenia and Azerbaijan that would bring much more sophisticated and deadly weapons to the fight than were seen in the early 1990s. The humanitarian crisis that would follow could overshadow the current tally of 30,000 dead and 1 million

¹ The northern distribution network is a system of transportation corridors used to sustain military operations in Afghanistan from the north, thereby diversifying lines of communication and providing alternatives to the most direct route through Pakistan.

internally displaced persons since the conflict began.² Moreover, the alliances that have developed in recent years may very well involve Russia and Turkey in the foray, if not directly then by proxy.

Understanding this conflict, the causes of failed mediation, and the influences and interests of other nations involved is critical to successful diplomacy in the region. United States domestic political interests, which amount to a tug-of-war between the Armenian diaspora lobby and the commercial interest of the oil industry, should be balanced with broader global security concerns. Foreign policy goals that affect the South Caucasus must take into account the regional balance of power that pivots around this conflict. Perhaps most importantly, the influence that the United States wields internationally must be directed constructively within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group in order to contain, and perhaps eventually resolve, this conflict.

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

After two decades of mediation led by the most powerful nations in the world, the questions that occupy many scholars, politicians, and diplomats are what went wrong and what could be done differently. Were mediation attempts flawed, if so how, and to what extent can these flaws be blamed for continued conflict? Has mediation outlived its usefulness and become stale? Are the two parties simply going through the motions as though it were international theatre, having developed a habitual bias for inaction? What role do other powers play in this conflict, and what are their interests with regard to conflict resolution? What are the interests of OSCE Minsk Group member nations in continuing mediation even though it has been unsuccessful for nearly two decades? Do contributing factors lurking below the surface stand in the way of resolution? The fundamental question is whether this conflict is, in fact, intractable beyond the limits of what third-party mediation is capable of resolving.

To understand the underlying factors behind failed mediation in this conflict one must look deeper than simply outlining the reasons that specific proposals were

² Philip Gamaghelyan, "Intractability of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Myth or a Reality?," *Special Report, Peace & Conflict Monitor* (2005): 1.

unsuccessful or the superficial reasons why each nation is unwilling to compromise. Research into this dispute has found that this conflict is rooted at three distinct levels, where it has continued to evolve since the 1994 ceasefire. Analyses at the levels of the elite, the nation, and the international structure reveal how actors at these distinctive levels view the conflict differently. All three levels respond differently to changing circumstances in the ongoing conflict and attempts at mediation, yet they are also interconnected. The linkages between these three levels have evolved in ways that reinforce each other to maintain a status quo of frozen conflict.

At the international level, the role played by large regional powers, as well as the United States, is significant in preventing effective mediation and perpetuating this conflict. At this level, the conduct of both conflicting parties largely conforms to what a realist paradigm suggests. Alliances and partnerships have formed along predictable lines based on individual state interests, and competition for the leading role in mediation has developed among these nations who are interested in gaining greater regional power and influence. In this way, a venue for forum shopping has been established wherein both countries can seek alliance with mediators sharing common interests. A balance of power in the realm of mediation mirrored the balance of power among states on the international stage. This bipolar structure created competition for power, in terms of access and resources, thereby preventing mediators from using leverage to establish incentives for compromise.

Power and interests of third parties at the international level contribute to the influence of the ruling elite in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both nations' alliances with larger powers have provided them economic, military and political support that has allowed the ruling elite to maintain their entrenched positions. The international conflict inhibits democratic reform and legitimizes the authoritarian regimes on both sides of the dispute. The political and economic elites, more concerned with power and wealth than conflict resolution, rely on maintaining the status quo to stay in power.

The power and control of the autocratic regimes in both countries, combined with the ongoing threat of renewed war, reinforce the nationalistic sentiments within the societies of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Politics is firmly rooted in ethnic nationalism on

both sides of the dispute, and political competition in these partial democracies provides a venue for unremitting nationalistic propaganda. Militarism is deeply entrenched at the national level, and an escalating arms race is fueled by money funneled away from societal reforms and democratic institution building. For both nations, this dispute has become part of a national identity that has strengthened over time and maintains a high degree of social inertia.

Intractability in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh is the product of a deeply interconnected structure that links disparate actors at different levels of the conflict, each with their own motivations, to a shared interest in maintaining the status quo. Moreover, conflict at each level contributes to factors at other levels that further cement existing conditions. For this reason, failed attempts at mediation cannot be attributed to any single factor, and long-term resolution is a complex undertaking. Single-track approaches that focus on the international considerations of the conflict have been insufficient, yet under the current conditions, attempts at multi-track diplomacy that could have greater influence on society have been unable to gain traction.

While renewed conflict is not a foregone conclusion, the likelihood of another war is realistically higher than expecting positive results from 20 more years of OSCE mediation in its current form. Nonetheless, the Minsk Group has maintained dialogue and kept alive the diplomatic structure that has provided a political outlet through which both countries can air their grievances on the international stage without escalating the conflict. Eventually, the geopolitical balance of power will shift for reasons one has yet to imagine. As the interests of regional powers change there may be an opening in which mediators will be able to gain the necessary leverage to bring about a peaceful settlement. As unproductive as it appears in this case, diplomacy should not be put on hold. A structure for talks must remain in place and mediators need to be ready to act decisively when the conditions are right. Ongoing passive mediation by the Minsk Group can keep diplomatic channels open and defuse interstate tension while maintaining a watchful eye on regional shifts of power. In the meantime, promoting and incentivizing democratic reform in both nations is essential for creating the conditions that can bring lasting peace.

Compromise by either nation will remain elusive as long as autocratic regimes continue to rely on this ongoing conflict to maintain power and legitimacy.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most literature addressing the topic of mediation and conflict resolution in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh focuses on two general areas: the ethnic/nationalistic roots of the conflict and the attempts by third parties to mediate the conflict. Analyses that focuses on mediation are divided by those scholars who believe that the mediators themselves are the source of the problem and those who believe that intermediaries have adopted the wrong approach to mediation. The way in which the problem is framed in each of these three categories often leads authors to suggest solutions that are blind or contradictory to concerns outside the limited scope of their analysis.

Those authors who address the ethnic and nationalistic roots of the conflict view the problem through the lens of liberalism or constructivism. Scholars that represent this viewpoint include Thomas de Waal, David Laitin, Ronald Suny, Philip Gamaghelyan, and Ceylan Tokluoglu. Their approach to resolution is attentive to the national and individual levels of analysis and focuses on the perceptions of the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations.

Thomas de Waal asserts “the Nagorny Karabakh conflict makes sense only if we acknowledge that hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis were driven to act by passionately held ideals about history, identity and rights.”³ He also proposes that the conflict remains unresolved because of the “local dynamics and calculations of local actors rather than the conduct of international mediators and the format of negotiations.”⁴

David Laitin and Ronald Suny agree with de Waal in a widely held belief that “the origins of the current conflict are shrouded in the mists of the twentieth century,” and assert that conflict resolution requires that Armenians and Azerbaijanis set aside their local perceptions and extreme nationalism that blossomed after independence from 70

³ Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 272.

⁴ Thomas de Waal, “Remaking the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Process,” *Survival* 52, no. 4 (2010): 160.

years of Soviet rule.⁵ They assert that only the political conditions of the mediations prevented agreement and not the structure of the conflict itself.⁶

Philip Gamaghelyan contends that the conflict is rooted in issues of identity and profound mistrust based on historical events. He proposes a broad range of liberalizing reforms to address these issues while fostering cooperation. His recommended reforms include democratization, reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey, and integration of the regional economic and security infrastructure. Gamaghelyan believes that promoting greater integration will create a cohesive pan-Caucasian identity that will supplant national identities and dampen the effects of ethnic conflict.⁷

Ceylan Tokluoglu examines the political discourse of Azerbaijani elites and discovers not only negative perceptions of Armenians but also a general distrust of all countries with interests in the region, including Turkey, which has a profoundly negative impact on conflict resolution. Tokluoglu's viewpoint diverges from the other constructivist opinions in that he has a more realistic understanding of the difficulty in enacting policy aimed at changing perceptions. He concludes that the current political narrative blocks interstate communication and reduces the likelihood that any attempt by outsiders could have a positive impact while this conflict is ongoing.⁸

The difficulty with a constructivist approach to conflict resolution in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, that Tokluoglu mentions, is that barriers to communication and entrenched viewpoints, typical of states at war, provide no way for an outside party to directly interject. The aforementioned authors who posit a solution that revolves around changing perceptions, paradigms, and values offer no realistic way in which this could be done. Their methodology will undoubtedly be vital for long-term stability in the region

⁵ David D. Laitin and Ronald Grigor Suny, "Armenia and Azerbaijan: Thinking a Way Out of Karabakh," *Middle East Policy* VII, no. 1 (1999): 146.

⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁷ Gamaghelyan, "Intractability of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Myth or a Reality?," 1–13; Philip Gamaghelyan, "Rethinking the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Identity, Politics, Scholarship," *International Negotiation* 15, no. 1 (2010): 34–54.

⁸ Ceylan Tokluoglu, "The Political Discourse of the Azerbaijani Elite on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1991–2009)," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 7 (2011): 1223–52.

but poses no prospect for brokering a peace agreement that would prevent further escalation in the short-term. Until political and geographic barriers associated with the ongoing conflict are reduced, there are limited opportunities for changing the belligerent's perceptions of one another.

International mediation, as an instrument for maintaining communication and reducing barriers to resolution, is a critical topic surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Mediator bias is a theme that many authors invoke as a contributing factor in this diplomatic impasse. Several articles across the spectrum of literature make reference to the bias of mediators in this conflict, particularly with regard to Russia being the most biased. Bahar Baser and Wendy Betts succinctly address this valid but perplexing problem. Two interrelated aspects surround mediators and their biases in this conflict. First, biased mediators may be more concerned with furthering their individual national interests than with resolving the conflict. Second, a plethora of willing and capable mediators creates competition among them and an opportunity for forum shopping by the parties to the conflict. Each party can align with a mediator they feel will offer them the most favorable position in a resolution.⁹

Bahar's and Bett's arguments are valid and backed up by prominent scholars of conflict mediation such as William Zartman, Saadia Touval, Chester Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, but in most cases mediators will have a bias. Mediation is an instrument of foreign policy, and if another state did not have an interest in the outcome of the conflict there would be no incentive for them to participate.¹⁰ According to Greig and Diehl, 95 percent of all mediation by international organizations and 85 percent of all state sponsored mediation has been unbalanced.¹¹ Parties to a conflict are usually more

⁹ Bahar Baser, *Third Party Mediation in Nagorno Karabakh: Part of the Cure or Part of the Disease?* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Publishing, 2008); Wendy Betts, "Third Party Mediation: An Obstacle to Peace in Nagorno Karabakh," *SAIS Review* 19, no. 2 (1999), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sais_review/v019/19.2betts.html.

¹⁰ Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela R. Aall, *Turbulent Peace : The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 428, 507.

¹¹ J. Michael Greig and Paul F. Diehl, *International Mediation* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2012), 75.

interested in a mediator's ability to produce an attractive outcome than its neutrality.¹² Baser, Betts and others, who reference the problem of mediator interests and competition, are framing the problem around the mediation and failing to appreciate the larger balance of power at the structural level. In blaming biased mediators for failed mediation, Baser ignores the structural element of state interests in international relations. Similarly, Betts concludes that a greater level of cooperation between the United States and Russia would resolve the difficulty in mediation.¹³

The approach third parties take toward mediation is another significant category of literature on resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. There are a great number of works on the general theory of mediation that contributes to understanding options available to third party intermediaries. Forms of mediation are characterized by the level of involvement by the third party, ranging from conciliation to power mediation, and escalate in involvement from simply establishing communication between the disputants to coercively manipulating the situation to force an outcome.¹⁴

Mediations by the OSCE Minsk Group over the last two decades have been predominantly passive in character, taking a "pure mediation" form to use Greig and Diehl's terminology.¹⁵ The OSCE has directed the focus of talks and have offered innovative solutions, but have not applied leverage in the form of "carrots or sticks" to externally incentivize an agreement.¹⁶ Most critics of the OSCE's mediation efforts argue that more involved power mediation is required.

Thomas Ambrosio suggests that the United States is in a relatively unbiased position with the leverage to support more active measures toward reconciliation, but he admits that the country lacks the political will to follow through on its stated goals of

¹² I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval, "International Mediation: Conflict Resolution and Power Politics," *Journal of Social Issues* 41, no. 2 (1985): 27.

¹³ Betts, "Third Party Mediation."

¹⁴ Greig and Diehl, *International Mediation*, 7–9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

fostering peace in the region.¹⁷ Wayne Merry is a proponent of “old-fashioned great-power collusion,” and suggests that Turkey should be invited to play a more active role in mediation.¹⁸ These arguments, while valid, present a problem similar to biased mediation by glossing over the significance of a state’s interest in mediation and discounting the issues of competition, forum shopping, and balance of power. The lack of political will on the part of the United States, that Ambrosio notes, is a function of the state’s relative interest. Until circumstances in this conflict change, through either a shift in the balance of power or relative interest, the probability of successful mediation will remain quite low.

Notably absent in the extensive literature on this topic is a discussion of how the contemporary roles of large powers influence conflict resolution on the larger international stage. Michael Croissant comes the closest in his balanced historical assessment. He discusses the influence of nationalism at the state level and the geopolitical competition among larger states, but he draws no linkage between them.¹⁹ Croissant’s book was also published just four years after the ceasefire. In the past 15 years, a great deal has evolved on the international stage that has continued to reshape this conflict.

Understanding the elements of the global power structure that influence this ongoing dispute, and the threads that connect different levels of analysis, can provide a breadth and depth in appreciating the apparent intractability of this conflict. A broad understanding encompasses the extent to which regional and global powers influence this conflict, and a deep examination refers to how changes at the international level affect the perception of key leaders and subsequently ripple through society.

¹⁷ Thomas Ambrosio, “Unfreezing the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict? Evaluating Peacemaking Efforts under the Obama Administration,” *Ethnopolitics* 10, no. 1 (2011): 93–114.

¹⁸ Wayne Merry, “Karabakh: ‘Frozen’ Conflict Nears Melting Point,” *Open Democracy*, May 14, 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/wayne-merry/karabakh-frozen-conflict-nears-melting-point>; Thomas de Waal, Wayne Merry, and Sergey Markedonov, panel discussion moderated by Ross Wilson, “Russia’s Aims and Priorities in Nagorno-Karabakh,” The Atlantic Council of the United States, October 1, 2012, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/news/in-the-news/russias-aims-and-priorities-in-nagornokarabakh-10-1-12-transcript>.

¹⁹ Michael P Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998).

E. METHODS AND SOURCES

Research has been conducted as a case study to investigate the most significant factors contributing to failed mediations in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This study investigates the conflict at three distinct levels, that of the elite, the nation and society, and the international structure and draws conclusions that may inform future foreign policy toward this region.

Analysis at the level of the elite, society, and the international structure is focused on determining what can be accomplished by outside actors in bringing about resolution. Attention will be given to those elements of international relations that potentially influence parallel levels of analysis at the individual and national level. The interaction between international policy, individual decision-makers, and the civil society in Armenia and Azerbaijan is assessed through the lenses of the liberalism and constructivism perspectives appropriately.

Materials for this research have been limited to sources available in the English language and includes foreign policy documents, scholarly books and articles, media reports, and analysis and reports prepared by organizations with interests in this region. This protracted conflict has strongly influenced the literature that has been written on the topic over the last quarter century and has led to varying levels of bias in virtually every domain. Consideration has been given to the potential nationalistic viewpoint of every source. Bearing in mind that not all statistics or factual accounts are available from opposing sides, this thesis attempt to distill rhetoric from reality and present both viewpoints when they are discovered. The intent of this paper is to present an unbiased assessment of the conflict.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

To understand why mediation has been unsuccessful, it is necessary to understand the complex structure of the existing status quo between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This thesis is organized into six chapters that provide the theory and history behind this intractable conflict and explain the conflict from three distinct levels of analysis.

Chapter II introduces the theoretical framework that explains the concepts that appear in the chapters that follow. Discussion of theory will include a brief introduction of the three prominent schools of thought in international relations theory: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. A discussion of the levels-of-analysis approach to problem framing also sets the stage for understanding the different layers of this conflict. Chapter II concludes with a discussion of mediation with multiple mediators and its effect on mediators' leverage.

Chapter III presents an overview of the conflict and its recent history. The historical overview will explain the circumstances leading to ethnic friction between the nations of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the conditions that led to the formation of Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous republic. The narrative illustrates the critical events through dissolution of the Soviet Union and the conduct of the war, the multiple attempts at mediation, and the circumstances faced by both nations as the war ended under the 1994 ceasefire.

Chapter IV explores the conflict at the level of the elite and the nation. It examines the development of post-soviet domestic politics in each country and explains the rise of competitive ethno-politics that continues to perpetuate the current conditions. The influence that the ongoing frozen conflict has had on society is illustrated as a contributing impediment to conflict resolution. Chapter IV also describes the prospective roles of economic integration, informal diplomacy, and concludes by discussing the importance of democratic reform in resolving this conflict.

Chapter V addresses the conflict at the international level. It discusses different approaches to mediation in this conflict and the role that mediators have played. The chapter highlights the interests of large powers surrounding this conflict, alliance formation by Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the influence of the international structure on resolving the conflict over this disputed territory. It concludes by discussing the significance of the international system as a barrier to effective mediation.

Chapter VI illustrates the interconnectedness of the conflict at its three distinct levels and how conflict at each level reinforces the present status quo at the other levels.

The application of different theoretical approaches to various aspects of the conflict is reevaluated by looking at the conflict in aggregate. Chapter IV concludes by providing recommendations for a new long-term strategic approach to conflict resolution.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Referring to the origin of a dispute as a seed of conflict is not only a poetic metaphor but also a fitting analogy. Some seeds are carefully cultivated while others find fertile soil on their own. Many never germinate at all, even under the most favorable conditions. The seed itself determines what type of plant will emerge, but conditions beyond the seed determine how the sprout will grow. Conditions in the garden will affect the life of the plant, but so will the environment outside of the garden. The influence of sun, rain, and wind are all beyond the gardener's control. The circumstances and conditions under which a seed was planted can become less significant over time. A gardener that no longer wants a tree growing in the middle of his garden cares little about how it was planted. He can no longer simply dig up the seed or sapling and must now deal with a deeply rooted tree producing more seeds of its own. The circumstances that lead to conflict are not necessarily the same conditions that allow it to grow, and the growth that has taken place is impossible to undo. Like the metaphorical garden, the growth of the seeds of conflict into open warfare takes place at more than one level with different factors influencing each plane of development. Understanding the origin of an intractable conflict is important but it is only the first step toward finding resolution.

This chapter begins by introducing the theory behind a levels-of-analysis approach to international relations theory that provides three distinct perspectives in framing different aspects of a conflict. Drawing on the combined effects of all three levels of a conflict, the concept of intractability is explained along with the significance of mediation in such conflicts. The motives and rationale for mediator involvement in a conflict is explored as well as the complexity that may develop when multiple third parties are involved in mediating a conflict. Finally, this chapter explains the detrimental effects of multiple mediators' conflicting interests in the mediation process, how it may diminish mediation leverage, and how diverging interests among major powers can contribute to a conflict's ongoing intractability.

A. LEVELS-OF-ANALYSIS APPROACH

Kenneth Waltz proposes a levels-of-analysis approach to international relations theory that may be used to systematically divide aspects of conflict between influences and perceptions of the decision-making elite, civil society at the national level, and the international system.²⁰ Under the rubrics of this method the individual leader is best examined through a constructivist lens, the national level of analysis conforms primarily to the paradigm of liberalism, and the international system is governed by realism. Viewpoints overlap to some extent between the individual and national levels, leading Waltz to combine them in his later work.²¹ Nonetheless, these different elements are theorized to respond discriminately to different circumstances while together forming the broad composition of the conflict.

1. The Level of the Individual

At the level of the decision-making elite a constructivist lens is applied to understand the motivations and decisions that precipitate conflict. Constructivism is based on the belief system, norms, values, and identity held by individuals. This principle dictates that a person's actions toward objects and other actors are based on individually held perceptions. The decisions that an individual makes are based on their unique understanding of reality and how they view themselves and others. These perceptions, while influenced by the conditions of their surroundings, are socially constructed. Moreover, increased interaction and socialization with another actor will alter an individual's perception toward that actor and subsequently reshape the social structure as well as an individual's self-identity. Alexander Wendt argues, "Realism is a self-fulfilling prophecy."²² States that instinctively view other powers as threats will create in them an adversary. In this regard, conflict may emerge or resolution may remain elusive based on socially constructed narratives that perpetuate misperceptions of an

²⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War; A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). Waltz refers to three *images* rather than levels in his analysis.

²¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

²² Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 410.

adversary. Misperception, it can be said, is the mother of war. If both sides of a conflict have a clear understanding of their adversary's intent, their strength, and the support they will receive from their allies, war is much less likely. Frequently, an adversary's hostile intentions are exaggerated, as are one's own military capabilities.²³

2. The Level of the Nation

At the level of the nation and civil society the fundamentals of constructivism still have a part to play, but the liberalism paradigm emerges as the principal model. Liberalism provides a bottom-up view of politics wherein the demands of society, based on rational and risk-averse pursuit of wealth and welfare, are the primary influences on international relations. This paradigm relies on the assumption that government policy is accountable to society, and that through this relationship societal preferences become national interests. It asserts that conflict is a result of pursuing a state preference that exerts a negative externality on another state that the other state is unwilling to pay, based on a cost/benefit analysis. The economic strand of liberal theory ties societal preferences to economic interdependence among nations, suggesting that integrating commerce can maintain a stable peace.²⁴ In this respect, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye believe that complex interdependence between nations will preclude military engagement. They assert that in addition to mutual economic interdependence, "social and cultural globalism" contribute to a sense of interconnectedness that has a peaceful and stabilizing effect.²⁵ In general, liberal theory suggests that conflict is most prevalent when there are

²³ Jack S. Levy, "Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War: A Levels-of-Analysis Approach," in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, ed. Chester A Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela R Aall (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 18; Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," 396–98, 403–10.

²⁴ Norman Angell, "The Great Illusion," in *Conflicts after the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace*, ed. Richard K Betts (Boston: Pearson, 2008); Stephen G Brooks, "The Globalization of Production and the Changing Benefits of Conquest," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43, no. 5 (1999); Robert Owen Keohane and Joseph S Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, Fourth Edition ed. (New York: Longman, 2012).

²⁵ Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 228.

differences in fundamental beliefs (borders, culture, or distribution of public goods), competition over scarce resources, or asymmetric distribution of power or social influence.²⁶

Based on the aforementioned principles, liberalism theory emphasizes that “politics does not end at the waters’ edge,” and for this reason domestic politics can play a central part in interstate conflict.²⁷ The diversionary theory of war contends that humans are territorial creatures that easily attach social and emotional value to territory, and that these attachments become ingrained in their sense of national identity. When this happens, territorial dispute becomes a zero-sum equation where compromise is unthinkable and military action is seen as the only way to control a coveted parcel of land. Leaders and influential elites can exploit the resultant in-group versus out-group conflict to create an external scapegoat for domestic problems. Leaders may promote a historical myth that exalts their own national history and legitimacy while dehumanizing an adversary. Officials may gain political support through bellicose rhetoric or offensive military action. Large ethnic migrations may ensue, either as a matter of policy or for self-preservation, leading to greater cultural homogeneity in one group while creating greater social conflict and strains on resources, due to resettlement of refugees or internally displaced people, in another.²⁸

3. The Level of the International System

The international system is most frequently modeled through the paradigm of realism. This perspective is based on an understanding that states of the world exist in a larger anarchic realm, devoid of any higher authority. Machiavelli introduced the concepts behind realpolitik at the beginning of the sixteenth century in terms of interest and necessity. Each state decides on its own the conditions under which it finds violence necessary to protect its interests, and therefore war may erupt at any time. While war is a

²⁶ Ibid., 20-21; Andrew Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics,” *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997): 516–21.

²⁷ Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 20.

²⁸ Levy, “Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War,” 15–17; Jaroslav Tir, “Territorial Diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict,” *Journal of Politics* 72, no. 2 (2010): 415–17.

relatively infrequent occurrence, the amount of interaction between states guarantees that wars will sometimes occur. Violence does indeed occur in states where laws are written and enforced prohibiting it, so it is implausible that under the framework of any international system where enforcement is absent there will not also be violence. Kenneth Waltz asserts, “No human order is proof against violence.”²⁹ In this self-help system, the only way to ensure the security and prosperity of a state is to maintain or enhance its strength; therefore, the greatest interest of all states is power. Only once security is assured can a state seek other goals.³⁰

Balance of power theory suggests that states, as unitary actors, take measures, internally and externally through all means available, to maintain or advance their position in the international system with the goal of preserving the state. In the face of greater powers, states will balance internally by increasing their economic and military strength, developing protective policy, and cultivating shrewd strategy. Externally, states will attempt to develop strong and large alliances and take measures to thwart other states from doing the same. Whereas Waltz contends that states balance against greater powers, Stephen Walt suggests that states, as a matter of survival, will more often balance against states they feel are more threatening as a function of power, proximity, capability, and perceived intentions.³¹

Walt maintains that ideological solidarity is a contributing factor in alliance formation. Political, cultural, and ethnic similarities, while secondary to state survival, can influence a state’s choice of ally. Furthermore, he explains that ideological considerations are more important when states are relatively secure. Therefore, alliances that enhance security while also providing ideological solidarity should prove stronger than those that are based on security alone. Walt also explains that exaggerating the

²⁹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 103.

³⁰ Ibid., 102–03, 17, 22.

³¹ Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 8–12; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 118.

importance of ideological ties can be self-fulfilling if policies are adopted that favor similar states as friends and punish dissimilar states as enemies.³²

Regardless of the subtle variations in theories of alliance formation, alliances are ultimately formed on mutual interests. In the words of Lord Palmerston, states have “no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies, only interests that are eternal and perpetual.”³³ These state interests, in terms of security and power, invariably come in conflict with one another, as one state’s security becomes another state’s vulnerability. A state that expands its military forces for its security is seen by other states as threatening. Other states meet this security dilemma by building up their own forces, creating a spiral model of deterrence against one another, which can result in an arms race among states. In what Waltz refers to as the “tyranny of small decisions,” states make many shortsighted choices in the interest of security that ultimately create further obstacles to their security.³⁴ In this regard, realism dictates that the structure of the international system has the largest influence on interactions between states. War occurs, in part, because of unintended consequences of state action that is more concerned with immediate security than extending influence.³⁵

Factors that contribute to war seldom, if ever, exist at just one level. While each level of analysis should be framed independently through the appropriate paradigm, factors from each level will contribute to perceptions at other levels. In this way, complex conflicts that strongly resonate at multiple levels can become deeply entrenched, or intractable, over time.

³² Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” 18–26.

³³ David Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1846–1855* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 82–83.

³⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 111.

³⁵ Levy, “Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War,” 7; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 58–77; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 107–11.

B. INTRACTABLE CONFLICT

Many scholars and authors use the term intractable to imply that a conflict may never be solved. In this context, such a term could potentially doom efforts toward a peaceful resolution. There are, however, many conflicts throughout the world that are significantly more challenging than others to bring about an accepted solution. Crocker, Hampson, and Aall do not hesitate to label these as intractable conflicts, with the understanding that, while they pose significant obstacles, they are not impossible to resolve.³⁶

Every conflict is unique, but most intractable conflicts have some elements in common. Parties to a conflict take political solutions seriously only when the cost of continued fighting is believed to outweigh its benefits. While this shift can take place from changing circumstances of the conflict, a change in political elites, or when the public becomes tired of ongoing violence, in intractable conflicts this shift in the balance between cost and benefit does not happen. The conflict may not sufficiently hurt the elites, a sufficient number of people may benefit from the status quo, and conflicting interests may stand as barriers to negotiations. Leaders or elites whose political careers benefit from supporting popular nationalistic beliefs may also protract the conflict. Similarly, compromise may be inconceivable to leaders, leaving unconditional victory as the only acceptable solution. Past experience in failed negotiations is also a significant factor contributing to intractability in future negotiations. While it may appear that no mutually acceptable solution exists, it is often the case that such a solution does exist but it has already been rejected or discredited during a time that was not ripe for negotiation. Putting such options back on the table are exceedingly difficult for mediators and may invite staunch political opposition domestically among the conflicting parties. Other factors contributing to intractability include the abundance of military resources on both sides of the conflict; lack of security mechanisms such as effective monitoring, verification or confidence-building measures; and interests of third party states in perpetuating the conflict. While intractability results from the interaction of variables at

³⁶ Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela R. Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in the Hardest Cases* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2004), 7.

the individual, national, and international levels, most intractable conflicts are only resolved with considerable outside assistance through mediation.³⁷

C. MEDIATION

Mediation is a voluntary, non-binding, arrangement of assistance given to two or more parties to a conflict by at least one third-party that has no authority to impose the terms of a settlement. The object of mediation is to help conflicting parties, who retain control over the outcome, come to a settlement without resorting to violence. Mediation as a method of conflict resolution has grown substantially over the course of the last 70 years, particularly at the end of the twentieth century. In a 55-year period leading up to 1999, Michael Greig and Paul Diehl recorded 2,632 mediation attempts pertaining to 1,702 conflicts.³⁸ Of these, 64 percent took place in the 1990s compared to just 2.2 percent in the 1940s and 3.2 percent in the 1950s.³⁹ While mediation has grown in popularity, each case is still a unique and complex undertaking. Of all mediated conflicts in the same period more than 35 percent required multiple attempts by the same mediator, and 37 percent of all mediation revolved around just 10 of the 1,702 conflicts.⁴⁰ Given the voluntary nature of mediation, the resources expended by mediators, and the political credibility at stake, understanding motivations for both mediators and parties to a conflict to take part in mediation, particularly in an intractable conflict, is an important part of understanding the evolving nature of the conflict itself.⁴¹

There are a variety of responses that outside parties could take to an intractable conflict. They could leave the conflict alone and let war take its course, engaging only when it is in the vital interest of their own national security. Conversely, large powers such as the United States could involve itself in any or all conflicts with the hope of creating a more stable world. The most sustainable and productive approach is

³⁷ Ibid., 7–9, 186.

³⁸ Greig and Diehl, *International Mediation*, 32, 49.

³⁹ Ibid., 32–33.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 48–49.

⁴¹ Ibid., 4–6.

somewhere in between. Third parties that engage in mediating conflicts do so for strategic reasons as an instrument of their foreign policy.⁴²

Conventional wisdom suggesting that mediators should be disinterested, impartial, or neutral is unsubstantiated in theory and in practice. Mediators may engage defensively to protect economic interests and relationships or to increase their own security and regional stability. They may also act offensively in order to influence the terms of the settlement in their favor, establish trust and recognition from one or both parties that will increase their standing in regional relationships, or prevent a rival state from gaining an advantage by intervening. Frequently outside states engage in mediation for a combination of offensive and defensive reasons. All else being equal, conflicts that attract the most mediators are those that represent strategic national interests to large powers.⁴³

Parties to a conflict accept mediators for the same reasons that mediators seek involvement: they believe it will be in their best interest. Both parties may not entirely agree on a mediator, but objections may be withheld if one party feels that rejecting the mediator may harm their chances of resolution. A mediator's impartiality is shown to be less important to conflicting parties than their ability to produce results. Mediators who favor one side are frequently seen as beneficial agents of compromise who can deliver their favored side to a solution that both parties can agree on.⁴⁴

Mediation is complex and involves a three-way relationship as conflicting parties seek the most advantageous position against one another as well as the mediator. While mediators attempt to persuade each belligerent to make concessions that will resolve the conflict, mediators are also pursuing a strategy of their own. Therefore, one must recognize that actual conflict resolution may not be the highest priority among

⁴² Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, 13; Saadia Touval and I William Zartman, "International Mediation in the Post-Cold War Era," in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing Internal Conflict*, ed. Chester A Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela R Aall (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 428.

⁴³ Greig and Diehl, *International Mediation*, 78; Touval and Zartman, "International Mediation in the Post-Cold War Era," 428–29.

⁴⁴ Touval and Zartman, "International Mediation in the Post-Cold War Era," 432–33.

prospective third party mediators, regardless of their stated aims. Third parties may be more interested in maintaining a status quo that would not pressure an ally (or potential ally) to make significant concessions or put pressure on separate bilateral interests.⁴⁵

D. MULTIPLE MEDIATORS

Single state mediators are increasingly rare in longstanding, intractable conflicts, adding another dimension to the already complex dynamics of mediation. When working together, multiple mediators can balance the inherent biases among mediators, enhance leverage, isolate mediators with conflicting interests, increase international legitimacy, and divide costs and risks, but these benefits come at a price. Competition among mediators for the parties' attention can complicate communication and contribute to misperceptions among the parties about their positions, commitments, capabilities, and the structure of a process that the international community is willing to support. Cooperation and good communication among multiple mediators are critical in maintaining constructive mediation.⁴⁶

When mediators fail to properly communicate, when competing interests interfere with cooperation, or when additional would-be mediators attempt to interject themselves into the process, the conditions are favorable for forum shopping by the conflicting parties. Rather than adhering to a unified process, parties will side with the mediator who is most sympathetic to their position or offers the most favorable conditions. As circumstances change throughout mediation, parties may change favored mediators more than once. When major powers' conflicting strategic interests, dictated by the structure of the international system, create the conditions for forum shopping many elements of leverage required for effective conflict resolution are lost.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, 23–25.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 88–90; Greig and Diehl, *International Mediation*, 71–72.

⁴⁷ Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, 89–90; Greig and Diehl, *International Mediation*, 72–73.

E. LEVERAGE AND CONFLICTING INTERESTS

Leverage, or power, is the cornerstone of mediation and comes in a variety of forms. The first element of leverage is the mediator's ability to garner the support of other states that will stand behind the process and restrain those states that could obstruct progress.⁴⁸ Mediators with conflicting interests are each likely to gain the most support from states that share the same or similar interests, thereby polarizing the conflict further and spreading it to the larger regional or global stage. Lack of unity in mediation, and the resultant forum shopping, gives the belligerents power over the established mediators in determining whom they will work with. Keeping out obstructionists or any other would-be mediator is in the hands of the conflicting parties.

The second and most pivotal function of leverage pertains to the balance of power between the parties to the conflict. Drawing on the outcome of a stalemate, a mediator must convince the parties that a military solution is not in their best interest.⁴⁹ In the case of an intractable conflict, that has experienced long-standing ceasefire or prolonged low-intensity conflict, the outcome of the original stalemate becomes increasingly irrelevant. Conflicting mediators and other large regional or global powers competing for the parties' attention through military, economic, or political support can erase the effects of the historical stalemate and perpetuate a belief that resolution can be achieved without compromise.

Conventionally, an intermediary may attempt to use his power to establish bilateral agreements that put pressure on both parties in a balanced way so that pressure on one side does not result in an advantage by the opposing side.⁵⁰ Under the circumstances created by mediator competition and polarized strategic interests, neither mediator may have sufficient pressure on both parties to bring about substantial results. Should one mediator attempt to apply pressure alone, they risk falling out of favor with the parties and losing their place at the table. Even if an agreement were possible among

⁴⁸ Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, 94.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 94–95.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

all mediators, with strategically neutral objectives, the collective action problem could prevent them from following through. If one side fails to comply with the arrangement their favored side in the dispute could emerge at a strategic advantage.

Leverage may come in the mediator's ability to influence the cost versus benefit calculation and insecurity concerns by both sides through conflict monitoring, information sharing and security guarantees.⁵¹ This form of leverage demands unity of effort among mediators to portray an accurate depiction of the military and political situation, and it requires trust by both parties to accept this information as fact. Independently, mediators' interests in the terms of a settlement, or a stronger relationship with one party over the other, could influence their perception of costs and benefits or contribute to a hesitance in sharing critical strategic information. Furthermore, either party may be reluctant to accept security guarantees that involve peacekeeping forces provided by a mediator that does not share their long-term strategic interests.

An effective third-party broker must be willing to expend resources and call on international support to maintain security throughout the peace process, and both parties must believe in the mediator's resolve.⁵² The uncertainty of resolution in an intractable conflict and its long duration may be exacerbated by strategic competition and drain a mediator's domestic political will.⁵³ Mediators may expend sufficient resources to maintain their strategic position, but the collective action problem may inhibit a state from exhausting resources or credibility on a conflict that does not impinge directly on its national security. There is an inherent unknown return on investment in mediating an intractable conflict, and interstate competition of unknown duration may contribute to a conservative allocation of blood and treasure. The parties may interpret this cautious approach toward economic and political capital as a lack of resolve on the part of the mediators.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 16.

To maintain leverage, a third-party must be able to force both sides to make difficult choices toward compromise and be willing to see those decisions through.⁵⁴ For a mediator in a complex scenario of conflicting interests, finding compromise while maintaining a productive relationship with one or both parties is a difficult proposition. Networks of political, military and economic support from other influential powers can prevent mediators from creating a dilemma that forces either party to make a critical decision.

Leverage stems from the parties' need for a solution and the belief that the mediator can provide results, the receptiveness of the parties to pressure from a mediator, and the parties' interest in incentives or disincentives (carrots or sticks) that the mediator may present.⁵⁵ Mediators cannot effectively promise to one side more than the opposition will concede, therefore overall leverage in conflict resolution is limited by the side that experiences the least pressure from the mediator's power.⁵⁶ If the mediators have more at stake in mediation than the parties do, if the parties can counter or redirect pressure from a single mediator, or if the parties can shop independently among multiple mediators for the most favorable incentives, the conflicting parties are in a position to exploit the mediation process to their own advantage and stifle progress toward resolution.

F. CONCLUSION

A seed of conflict may be planted at the individual, national, or international level, but if a conflict is allowed to grow it will strengthen and adapt to interaction at other levels. Conflicts that powerfully resonate in all three areas may, over time, become intractable. Resolution, in these cases, depends on international involvement through mediation. Mediators emerge as foreign policy actors first, concerned primarily with their own strategic interests. Frequently the interests of mediators coincide with the interests of the conflicting parties, and a mediator's leverage is sufficient to change the balance in favor of a lasting solution. Occasionally, there are multiple mediators who

⁵⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁵⁵ Touval and Zartman, "International Mediation in the Post-Cold War Era," 40.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 42.

have conflicting interests at stake in the mediation process. When mediators, particularly large powers, are unwilling to compromise on the terms of a settlement, the overall leverage available to all mediators is diminished. In this case, the mediation process, and sometimes the conflict itself, becomes entrenched in the wider geopolitical strategy of the major powers whose interests are at stake.⁵⁷

Intractability is not a static condition but an ongoing, self-perpetuating, cycle with conditions at each level of a conflict influencing factors at other levels. While a lasting peace depends on resolution at all levels of the conflict, outside influence through mediation is limited at its very onset. The preliminary role of a third party in mediation is to break the cycle by altering the thought process of the decision making elites while temporarily reducing the uncertainty inherent in the anarchic international system. When mediators fail to accomplish these goals the conflict remains unresolved, but if mediators or other major powers engulf the conflict in a larger strategic contest the conflict grows more intractable.

⁵⁷ Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, 33.

III. HISTORY OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

A. INTRODUCTION

Nagorno-Karabakh is an Armenian-populated mountainous territory about the size of the Grand Canyon National Park, precariously located within Azerbaijan.⁵⁸ Conflicting territorial aspirations over Nagorno-Karabakh grew alongside ethnic conflict that emerged in the years leading up to Armenia's and Azerbaijan's statehood in 1918. Throughout World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and Russian Civil War, larger nations exploited this ethnic conflict in pursuit of their own strategic interests. As the Soviet Union took shape, Nagorno-Karabakh was given autonomy within the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). Beginning in 1988, when Soviet authority was weakened under the policy of Glasnost, nationalist sentiments were reborn in both republics and spiraled into violent conflict centered on Karabakh. Following the fall of the Soviet Union the conflict escalated to full-scale war. Fighting continued until there was a Russian-brokered ceasefire in 1994 between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the de facto government of Nagorno-Karabakh. The war ended with Armenians controlling Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts that account for just less than one-fifth of the territory of Azerbaijan. In the 19 years since the ceasefire, there have been numerous mediation attempts, but no final peace has been negotiated between the parties. Furthermore, the parties to the conflict never reached agreement on a peacekeeping force. The ceasefire has been maintained only by the restraint of the parties themselves. The resulting situation of no war and no peace has been referred to as a frozen conflict. Unfortunately, strategic posturing by both Armenia and Azerbaijan indicate that the only thing that is frozen is the peace process.

This chapter provides a historical chronology that illustrates the depth of this conflict relating to the development of national identities, the actions and beliefs of military and political leadership that supported popular nationalist sentiments, and the

⁵⁸ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 10; "CIA World Fact Book: Azerbaijan," Central Intelligence Agency, last modified September 10, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>. 4,800 square kilometers (1,853 square miles) is just larger than half the size of the county of Monterey, CA, and occupies roughly 5.5 percent of the land area of Azerbaijan.

interaction with international actors. This account provides a background to the factors at the individual, national, and international level that contribute to the conflict's intractability. The territorial dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh is deeply rooted in issues of ethnic identity and nationality, both of which have been formed over the course of this long conflict. Political elites whose careers have survived the turmoil carry their nationalistic sentiments with them to higher offices. On the international stage, larger states, sometimes unwittingly, create conditions that foster ethnic conflict, perpetuate violence, or fail to support a resolution when the opportunity presents itself. The effects of the conflict at all three levels combine synergistically to perpetuate the cycles of intractability that exist today.

B. HISTORICAL HOMELAND

The geography of the Caucasus, as a land bridge between continents, has made it a heavily trafficked region and natural battleground in clashes between expanding empires. Having endured Persian, Roman, Arab, and Turkic occupation over the centuries, the region has experienced significant ethnic and cultural mixing. The Roman Empire brought Christianity to the region in the fourth century, and Islam took root with the Arab occupation in the seventh century. Having experienced such cultural amalgamation, it should come as no surprise that Armenia and Azerbaijan can both find evidence supporting a historical claim to a small piece of territory in the center of it all.⁵⁹

Armenia stakes its claim to Nagorno-Karabakh as part of the vast Armenian kingdom existing perhaps as early as the fourth century BCE. Azerbaijan's claims date back to the same era, although the name Azerbaijan did not emerge until the twentieth century. Azerbaijani roots can be traced back to the Caucasian Albanians that occupied the region before the ascendancy of the Roman Empire in the Caucasus. After occupations by several empires, Azerbaijani Turkic language and culture was clearly distinguishable by the sixteenth century under the Iranian Safavid Dynasty.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 3; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 80; Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity Under Russian Rule* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), 2.

Over centuries, the Armenian and Azerbaijani cultures developed on different paths shaped by different influences. Distinguishable cultural characteristics, particularly in language and religion, developed among Armenians earlier than other ethnic groups of the region. These differences set them apart as a minority in occupying empires and made them a target for persecution. The experiences of oppression had a lasting influence on the cultural identity of the Armenian people and contributed to ethnic solidarity and a sense of protectionism. Azerbaijanis adopted a common language and religion later than Armenians, and therefore did not experience the same unifying pressures. Their belated development of nationality fostered closer integration with the people of conquering empires giving them a more diverse culture but further delaying the development of a solidified identity.⁶¹

Scholars on both side of the dispute contest the other's claim that Nagorno-Karabakh is their historical homeland. Historians that support Armenia's claim assert that Karabakh was predominantly Armenian populated when the Russian Empire captured it in 1805, following the Russo-Iranian War. Azerbaijan claims that it was Armenian immigration from Iran following the war, allowed by a provision in the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay, that led to an Armenian ethnic majority in Karabakh. When Iranian territory was brought under the Russian Empire, administrative boundaries were redrawn. The former Khanate of Karabakh was expanded to include additional territory to the east and was subsequently renamed Elisavetpol Guberniia. Owing to the geography of the land, this expanded boundary tied the mutually dependent mountainous and pasture communities together to accommodate semi-nomadic herders, facilitate transportation, and enhance economic cooperation. The remainder of Armenia was not annexed until 1826, thus separating Armenians between the two empires for 21 years.⁶²

C. CONFLICT IS BORN

Nearing the end of the nineteenth century, the policies of the Russian Empire favored Armenians over Azerbaijanis. Armenians were typically city dwellers that

⁶¹ Ibid., 4–7.

⁶² Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 28; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 13.

occupied more lucrative positions in society whereas Azerbaijanis were predominantly rural unskilled laborers. As an example of this, when the state monopoly on the oil industry was lifted in 1860, oil land was purchased predominantly by elite Russians and Armenians.⁶³ Of 54 oil firms in Baku by 1888, only two were Azerbaijani-owned.⁶⁴ Similarly in politics, while Azerbaijanis made up more than 80 percent of those who would qualify for suffrage based on income, they held less than half the seats in local government due to the restrictions placed on non-Christians.⁶⁵ During this period Azerbaijani nationalism was first inspired by the small but influential Azerbaijani intelligentsia in the form of Pan-Turkism, a phenomenon that started in the Ottoman Empire and spread from Eastern Europe to Western China. While the root of discontent between Armenians and Azerbaijanis was buried in Russia's pro-Christian policies, Azerbaijanis did not view Russia as the culprit. Instead, Azerbaijani identity was born in an environment that promoted ethnic hatred for their perceived Armenian oppressors.⁶⁶

Ethnic tension that had built up boiled over in 1905. When Russian authority in the South Caucasus diminished during the first Russian revolution, wide scale ethnic violence erupted along parallel class and ethnic lines. In February, Baku saw riots that left hundreds dead on both sides. Fighting simultaneously erupted in Yerevan, spreading to Nakhichevan in May and Shusha by June. In September riots reemerged in Baku where Armenian industries were attacked and oil wells were burned. In the course of a week, fighting left 1,500 dead and 1,026 of 1,609 oil wells demolished.⁶⁷ Total casualties from these prolonged riots are estimated between 3,100 and 10,000.⁶⁸ A cautious peace was restored only at the end of the year when the revolution collapsed.⁶⁹

⁶³ Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 21.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁶ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 8; Svante E Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2001), 56.

⁶⁷ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 9.

⁶⁸ Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 56.

⁶⁹ Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 40–41; Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 55–56; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 9.

The events of 1905 were the first demonstrations of violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis and brought an ethnic conflict to the surface that has continued for over a hundred years. Inaction on the part of Russia to stop the violence created insecurity on both sides and fostered desires to take actions that would protect local interests. Armenian revolutionaries focused their attention on asserting autonomy in historically Armenian dominated territory, specifically Nagorno-Karabakh. For the Azerbaijanis, 1905 promoted a sense of solidarity through mutual suffering that fueled a nascent nationalist movement. Armenian irredentist sentiments, combined with bloodshed and resentment, fed a growing sense of Azerbaijani community and reinforced the development of an anti-Armenian identity.⁷⁰

D. STATEHOOD

Following the October revolution of 1917, in the midst of World War I, Bolsheviks ordered Russian troops out of the Caucasus, leaving favorable conditions for the Turkish Army to take back territory lost to Russia during the war. For reasons of mutual security in the subsequent power vacuum, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan came together to form the Transcaucasian Commissariat on 30 October, which became the Transcaucasian Diet by March 1918. With support from France and England, the Transcaucasian Commissariat established small armies they hoped would defend it against the Ottoman Empire.⁷¹

The newly formed diet had its first order of business in early March in reaction to the recently signed Brest-Litovsk Treaty, whereby Bolsheviks forfeited the Transcaucasian provinces of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum to Turkey to get Bolshevik Russia out of the war. Denying the legitimacy of the Bolshevik brokered treaty, the diet attempted to renegotiate its own settlement. In order not to violate the treaty, Turkey insisted that the diet declare independence before negotiating. Infuriated, the diet declared war on 13 April but lost Batum to the Turks the next day. On 22 April, the

⁷⁰ Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 56; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 9–10.

⁷¹ Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (rev. 2nd ed.). (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 248-49; Arsene Saparov, "Why Autonomy? The Making of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region 1918–1925," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 2 (2012): 284; Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 82–87.

Transcaucasian Diet complied with Turkish demands, declaring independence as the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, and resumed negotiations. Three days later the new federation surrendered Kars to Turkey, but before negotiations were complete Turkey demanded the provinces of Erivan and Tiflis as well, on the grounds of treaty violation.⁷²

The threat posed by Turkey's unrelenting demands led to the collapse of the federation. Georgia declared independence on 26 May in order to form a pact with Germany for protection in exchange for mineral resources.⁷³ Azerbaijan, fundamentally opposed to raising arms against a fellow Turkic Muslim people, also declared independence, having all the while maintained a separate delegation in an attempt to convince the Ottomans to recognize them as independent.⁷⁴ One week later, Azerbaijan signed a treaty with the Ottoman government to provide military support.⁷⁵ Armenia, on its own, negotiated the 4 June Treaty of Batum with the Ottoman Empire, in which it lost Kars, Ardahan, and portions of the Tiflis and Erivan Governorates to Turkey.⁷⁶ Determined to connect the Ottoman Empire to the Caspian Sea, the Turkish Army, aided by the Azerbaijani Army of Islam, continued its advance across the Caucasian isthmus to capture Baku on 15 September 1918 and maintain control of the Caspian land bridge until the Mudros Armistice on 30 October.⁷⁷ The Caucasian states had been thrust into independent nationhood to survive amid the power struggle of larger nations and set on paths of diverging interests through their alliances with opposing powers.

⁷² Saparov, "Why Autonomy?," 284–86; Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 87.

⁷³ Richard Pipes, *The Formation of The Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism 1917–1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 194–95.

⁷⁴ Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 87.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 90. The Ottoman-Azerbaijan treaty raised the Army of Islam numbering as many as 18,000, but did not recognize Azerbaijani statehood.

⁷⁶ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 14; Saparov, "Why Autonomy?," 286. The newly formed Republic of Armenia consisted of only 4,500 square miles of rocky terrain (a little smaller than Connecticut, one-third the size of modern Armenia) with a population of 600,000, many of which were refugees from eastern Turkey.

⁷⁷ Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 92–93; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 14.

E. THE CONFLICT OVER KARABAKH EMERGES

By June 1918, external borders of the Caucasian states were outlined, but borders between the three were yet undefined. The tentative peace that existed for nearly thirteen years ended in August of 1918 when Azerbaijan announced it would delimit its borders and include Karabakh.⁷⁸ Up to that time, both Armenia and Azerbaijan laid claim to the region, citing their respective official maps as justification.⁷⁹ Facing mounting Armenian opposition, the Azerbaijani government was supported by the Turkish Army that marched on Shusha on 7 October.⁸⁰ With little resistance, Azerbaijan took control of Karabakh, but with limited troops it could only effectively control Shusha and the road to Agdam.⁸¹

The end of Ottoman participation in World War I led to the deployment of British troops to the Caucasus. When British troops took the territory formerly held by the Turks, they adopted the same policy on Karabakh. They quickly determined that people were too intermingled to draw an accurate ethnographic border that would please everyone.⁸² In border disputes that erupted concerning Nagorno-Karabakh, the British prerogative was to maintain the status quo and support the existing tsarist structure of the gubernii.⁸³ Significantly fewer in numbers than the Turkish Army, the British deployed with the intention of supporting self-determination of the people, and attempted to limit their influence on political decisions, although this is not how it always worked out.⁸⁴ While concerned about the strategic issues of German propaganda, the pan-Islamic threat, and later the Soviet involvement in Indian trade routes, the British were also keenly interested in establishing access to Baku's oil; therefore, they needed to maintain a friendly relationship with Azerbaijan.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Saparov, "Why Autonomy?," 289.

⁷⁹ Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 100.

⁸⁰ Saparov, "Why Autonomy?," 298.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 289.

⁸³ Ibid., 287.

⁸⁴ Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 93.

⁸⁵ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 15–16; Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 91–94.

F. AZERBAIJAN ASSERTS CONTROL

Azerbaijan, under British authority, took the next step toward controlling Karabakh, on 15 Jan 1919, by dismissing Armenian General Andranick Ozanian. Amid Armenian protests, Kurdish Azerbaijani governor, Khosrov Bek Sultanov, was appointed provisional governor-general of Karabakh. The meetings of the Fourth and Fifth Assembly of Karabakh Armenians in February and April both officially rejected Azerbaijani rule, insisting on being included into the Armenian Republic. Thereafter, the British consented to Azerbaijan using more domineering methods to gain compliance.⁸⁶

Azerbaijan's forcible approach to Karabakh began on 20 May, when Sultanov enacted a blockade that cut the mountains off from the steppe while Kurdish irregular troops, loyal to Sultanov, mounted attacks on Armenian villages. On 4 June 1919, Sultanov moved Azerbaijani troops into Shusha, attempting to force out the Armenian militia.⁸⁷ While British forces interrupted widespread violence, Sultanov was adamant about the removal of Armenian forces. The next day, Sultanov ordered an attack on nearby Armenian town of Khaibalikend, thereby putting an end to Armenian defiance. Departure of British troops on 10 August 1919 left Armenians without a mediator in the dispute, although by the end the British showed little remaining Armenian sympathy.⁸⁸

The seventh Assembly of Armenians of Karabakh signed an agreement in August that delineated the division of power between Karabakh and Azerbaijan and gave Karabakh a semi-autonomous status. Armenian nationalists were upset with Karabakh for giving in to Baku, and Azerbaijan was dissatisfied with the autonomy arrangement, preferring unconditional ownership of the territory.⁸⁹

From late 1919 through early 1920, Azerbaijan's legitimacy over Karabakh grew within the international community, leading to a renewed effort to incorporate the territory. In the summer of 1919, Colonel W.N. Haskell, an Allied high commissioner

⁸⁶ Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 94; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 16; Saparov, "Why Autonomy?," 289.

⁸⁷ Shusha, the former capital of the Karabakh Khanate, was the de-facto capital of Karabakh.

⁸⁸ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 16; Saparov, "Why Autonomy?," 290.

⁸⁹ Saparov, "Why Autonomy?," 289–90.

and representative of the U.S. State Department, visiting Baku as a non-partisan diplomat, declared that Karabakh should belong to Azerbaijan.⁹⁰ Early the next year the Paris Peace Conference, upholding an earlier Entente policy, affirmed Azerbaijan's right to govern Karabakh.⁹¹ Based on the outcome in Paris, Sultanov attempted to incorporate Karabakh into Azerbaijan. The Eighth Assembly of Karabakh Armenians met on 28 February, at Sultanov's request, and rejected outright any possibility of integration with Azerbaijan, citing violations of the August 1919 agreement.⁹²

G. ARMENIAN REBELLION / SOVIET INVASION

After the outcome of the Eighth Assembly, Armenians in Karabakh were concerned about a reprisal by Sultanov reminiscent of the previous spring. Their fears appeared to have materialized on 11 March when a report claimed 90 railway trucks filled with troops had left Baku for Karabakh. On the night of 22 March, Armenians put into motion a long anticipated rebellion, but the uprising was a failure, capturing only one Azerbaijani position at Askeran pass. Azerbaijani forces countered by burning down Armenian-populated areas of Shusha. Over the next 10 days, fighting continued with more Azerbaijani troops breaking through the Askeran Pass to occupy Shusha. The timing of the rebellion and the Azerbaijan military response could not have worked out better for the Soviet Red Army.⁹³

While the majority of Azerbaijani military forces were engaged in Karabakh, Bolsheviks took the opportunity to seize the undefended city of Baku. On the morning of 28 April 1920, Soviet forces established authority in Baku and claimed Azerbaijan as Soviet territory. The next day, Sultanov proclaimed himself chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of Red Karabakh. The new Baku soviet presented an ultimatum to Armenia: If Armenian troops were not withdrawn from Karabakh, the

⁹⁰ Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 102.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: From London to Sèvres, February-August 1920*, vol. 3 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 145.

⁹³ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 17; Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, 3, 156; Saparov, "Why Autonomy?," 291; Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation*, Rev. 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 147–50.

Republic of Azerbaijan would consider itself at war with the Republic of Armenia. Once the Red Army forces were consolidated in Baku, Moscow put military expansion operations on hold due to the concurrent Polish offensive in Ukraine. The Red Army was ardent about continuing Sovietization and expanding control of the land bridge to Turkey, but was restrained by Moscow's freeze on troop movements. Exploiting the ethnic conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Chairman of the Caucasian Bureau attached to the Eleventh Red Army, recruited Azerbaijani Bolsheviks and encouraged them to continue their military operations to claim Karabakh, Zangezur, and Nakhichevan.⁹⁴

H. SOVIETS EXPAND AS WORLD WAR I ENDS

Soviet expansion continued westward with Azerbaijani recruits and elements of the Red Army entering Shusha on 12 May, ostensibly to stop Armenian-Tatar massacres. When forces arrived, local Azerbaijani army units in Karabakh became Red Army units, and Sultanov was dismissed. While fervent in their struggle against Azerbaijan, Armenians of Karabakh did not attempt to resist the same troops marching under the flag of the Red Army, largely because it brought an end to Sultanov's oppression.⁹⁵

On 10 August the Ottoman Empire and the Allies signed the Treaty of Sevres that delineated a new border between Turkey and Armenia, giving a portion of eastern Turkish territory to Armenia. The Turkish nationalist movement had no intention of abiding by the Treaty and saw an opportunity to defy the Allied powers while building relations with the Bolsheviks.⁹⁶

In late September 1920, Turkish troops invaded Armenia. By early November, Turkish forces advanced as far as Alexandropol. Armenia surrendered to Turkey and negotiated the terms of the Treaty of Alexandropol, whereby Armenia would relinquish all territory lost in the war. In a move that by all appearances was well choreographed,

⁹⁴ Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union*, 224–27; Saparov, “Why Autonomy?,” 292; Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 98; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 18.

⁹⁵ Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, 3, 194–95; Saparov, “Why Autonomy?,” 293.

⁹⁶ Saparov, “Why Autonomy?,” 298.

the Red Army eagerly stepped in between the crumbling Armenian government and Turkey to assist in negotiations. Armenians surrendered to Bolshevik control without bloodshed on 1 December.⁹⁷

I. THE BORDER COMMISSION DELIBERATES ON KARABAKH

In the spring of 1921, the newly formed border commission began deliberation of boundary disputes, and Karabakh was at the top of the list. The commission decided on 3 June 1921 that Nagorno-Karabakh would belong to Armenia, and on 12 June the Armenian government accepted a decree signed by Alexander Myasnikyan stating the same. There are conflicting historical accounts of Azerbaijan participation at the meeting of the border commission. While some sources claim that Nariman Narimanov, the leader of the Soviet Government of Azerbaijan, was present at the meeting, others assert that the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist party had no involvement and remained unaware of this decision until it was published in Armenian newspapers on 15 June. By all accounts, the final decision had not been agreed upon before newspapers published this story, and Narimanov was not pleased with the interim decision. A telegram sent to Narimanov 25 June from Sergo Ordzhonikidze and Sergey Kirov stated their opinion:

In order to resolve all the frictions and to establish truly friendly relations when solving the question of Nagorno-Karabakh it is necessary to be guided by the following principle: not a single Armenian Village should be attached to Azerbaijan, equally not a single Muslim village should be attached to Armenia.⁹⁸

Narimanov rejected the decision, arguing from a logistical standpoint that economic ties and administration would be adversely affected and should be considered over ethnic reasons for the borders, and elevated the decision to the Caucasus Bureau.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 18; Saparov, “Why Autonomy?,” 298, 301; Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union*, 232.

⁹⁸ Saparov, “Why Autonomy?,” 309.

⁹⁹ Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, 117; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 19; Saparov, “Why Autonomy?,” 308–10.

J. THE CAUCASUS BUREAU DECISION ON KARABAKH

After two days of deliberation, the Caucasus Bureau met on 4 July 1921, with Stalin, as Commissar of Nationalities, voting in favor of Karabakh going to Armenia. Narimanov again objected and insisted that the bureau push the decision to Moscow. The next day, in a curious turn of events most likely directed by Stalin, the bureau reversed its decision and adopted a new plan more agreeable to Narimanov. Karabakh would remain within the Azerbaijan SSR as an autonomous region. Narimanov, still not pleased, opposed even autonomy for Karabakh and asked the Caucasus Bureau to delay and reconsider assigning a commission to study the need for autonomy. After two years of debate, and under pressure from the Transcaucasian Regional Party Committee, Karabakh was granted autonomy on 7 July 1923. The official boundary decision took place in no less than five separate discussions leading to a final statute on 26 November 1924.¹⁰⁰

K. THE DORMANT CONFLICT IS REBORN

Under communist rule, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan was mostly suppressed, only coming to the surface when pressures on civil society reduced or political change was afoot. Karabakh Armenians sent several letters and petitions to Moscow requesting to be incorporated into the Armenian SSR in 1964 and 1965 during the post-Stalinist thaw of the Khrushchev era. Letters were also sent in 1977 during discussions over a new Soviet constitution. The last petition, sent in the summer of 1987, contained more than 75,000 signatures and was followed up by two delegations of Karabakh Armenians traveling to Moscow to discuss annexation to Armenia.¹⁰¹

Ethnic violence between Azerbaijanis and Armenians appeared to spontaneously spring from the ground in 1988, with the Soviet government seemingly unaware of the level of turmoil simmering over the previous seven decades. Initially, threats and violence went unreported in the media, even as Azerbaijanis began fleeing Armenia in

¹⁰⁰ Saparov, "Why Autonomy?," 312; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 19.

¹⁰¹ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 20, 26; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 16.

late 1987 and early 1988.¹⁰² By February 1988, when a third Armenian delegation arrived in Moscow, activists were already taking to the streets. Protest in Karabakh set off protests throughout Armenia that began under the cloak of environmental concerns but quickly changed to issues of nationality. Armenia was experiencing a national awakening and at the center of this phenomenon was Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁰³

Seven days into the Armenian protests, Baku started buzzing in political opposition to Karabakh's irredentist rhetoric. On 20 February, when the Karabakh SSR voted to secede from Azerbaijan, Baku crowds hinged on riot. City officials stepped in to reassert authority, and one of the measures taken to ensure stability in Baku was blocking entry to the city by would-be rioters. Among the blocked routes was the road from Sumgait, upon which a great number of working class Azerbaijanis traveled every day to their employment in Baku.¹⁰⁴

L. VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN SUMGAIT AND ECHOES THROUGHOUT BOTH REPUBLICS

The Kremlin responded to the Karabakh petition on 23 February, refusing the request to unite with Armenia. Concerned about damaging inter-ethnic relations, Gorbachev blamed "hooligan elements and anti-perestroika forces" for the uprising.¹⁰⁵ Three days later, protests began in Sumgait marking the first reported incidents of violence in the renewed conflict. That evening, a Soviet television news broadcast that covered the ongoing protests in Karabakh made note of two Azerbaijani men that had been killed five days prior. The response to this news the following day in Sumgait was tremendous. Over three nights, 29 Armenians and six Azerbaijanis were killed, hundreds were injured, and 5,000 Armenians sought shelter in the Palace of Culture in Sumgait's

¹⁰² de Waal, *Black Garden*, 19.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 19–22.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 30–31.

¹⁰⁵ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 27.

Lenin Square.¹⁰⁶ Almost all Armenians subsequently left Sumgait never to return, nearly 14,000 in total.¹⁰⁷ Throughout Azerbaijan, Armenians were leaving by the thousands.¹⁰⁸

Protests and violence continued in both Armenia and Azerbaijan over the course of 1988 leading to death, destruction, and large ethnic migrations. Armenians organized a strike on 3 July near Yerevan to disrupt operations at the nearby Zvartnots airport, to which Soviet troops responded by killing two and injuring more than 40. Protests emerged in Baku on 17 November over the government's weakness and inability to reassert control over Karabakh, representing a new level of Azerbaijani national awakening. The next day, rallies formed throughout Armenia again calling for unification with Nagorno-Karabakh. On 21 November, when the USSR Supreme Court announced a death sentence to an Azeri man who took part in the Sumgait riots, a new round of pogroms ignited wherein remaining Armenians were forced out of Baku and Ganja. By the end of November, the last Azerbaijanis residing in Armenia were also expelled.¹⁰⁹

M. EARTHQUAKE DEVASTATES ARMENIA AND RUSSIA FACES THE ETHNIC PROBLEM

Nearing the end of the year, the forces of nature finally pressured the Kremlin to react to ethnic unrest. A magnitude 6.9 earthquake struck Armenia at 11:41 am on 7 December. The initial quake was followed by several aftershocks leaving massive damage in several cities, up to 25,000 dead, and hundreds of thousands without homes.¹¹⁰ Gorbachev paid a visit to the devastated region three days later and faced an angry crowd. Adding to their bitterness with Moscow's response to Karabakh, the people were further upset with such a delayed and inadequate government response to such a

¹⁰⁶ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 40. Some Armenian reports claim higher death tolls that were in the hundreds.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 27–28; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 39–40.

¹⁰⁹ Svante E Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University Department of East European Studies, 1999), 20; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 30.

¹¹⁰ Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 210.

devastating emergency. On 12 January 1989, Moscow's late response to the ethnic turmoil was to implement social reforms aimed at improving the Karabakh economy and social services. A Russian Official, Arkadiy Volsky, was appointed by Moscow to take over the direct administration of the oblast and oversee the development program. Anything short of unification with Armenia fell short of appeasing the growing Armenian nationalist movement, and the loss of sovereignty over the territory also fomented discontent in Azerbaijan.¹¹¹

N. THE CONFLICT BECOMES POLITICAL AND INCREASINGLY MILITARISTIC

Over the course of 1989, fighting became more intense and militaristic while the ethnic dispute gathered political strength. Nationalist political parties in both Armenia and Azerbaijan were congealing their base of supporters, and Karabakh became the central issue of domestic politics. Armenia had not yet recovered from the devastating earthquake when renewed fighting emerged in the streets of Stepanakert and Mardakert in Karabakh. In July, Armenia enacted a blockade on Azerbaijan's exclave of Nakchivan. Azerbaijan retaliated with an embargo on Armenia. On 28 November, in what appeared to many a signal of defeat, the Soviet direct command was relieved, and Karabakh was again left in the hands of Azerbaijan. Armenia promptly responded to the changing situation by officially declaring itself reunited with Nagorno-Karabakh on 1 December.¹¹²

The next year opened with Armenian parliament voting on 9 January 1990 to include Nagorno-Karabakh within the Armenian SSR state budget, a move that further infuriated Azerbaijan. Attacks were launched in retribution on Armenians living in the Khanlar and Shaumian regions. The Azerbaijan Popular Front staged rallies in Baku's Lenin Square beginning on 6 January that were put down the next day by Soviet troops numbering in the thousands. Just four days later, radicals from the Popular Front

¹¹¹ Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 21; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 29–32; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 70; Suny, *Looking toward Ararat*, 210–12.

¹¹² Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 22–24; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 71; Suny, *Looking toward Ararat*, 212.

captured the Party buildings in Baku effectively overthrowing Soviet power. The pogrom in Baku that followed was reminiscent of previous violence in Sumgait, producing at least 88 Armenian casualties and inciting the last major wave of ethnic cleansing.¹¹³ Over the following days, thousands of Armenians were transported to Turkmenistan by ship or to Yerevan by air.¹¹⁴

The Kremlin imposed a state of emergency on Nagorno-Karabakh, the city of Ganja, and along the Armenian-Azerbaijan border on 14 January. Based on concerns over the rising power of the Azerbaijan Popular Front, the decision was made to extend the state of emergency to Baku on the night of 19 January. Poor communication by the military to the population and severe indiscriminate use of force on the part of the Soviet forces led to the deaths of 130 Baku citizens in a single night.¹¹⁵ Responding to Soviet brutality, the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet issued Moscow an ultimatum: remove all Soviet troops from Azerbaijan or Azerbaijan would secede from the union. Moscow dismissed Azerbaijan's threat, imprisoned several Popular Front leaders, and established martial law in Baku under the enforcement of a Soviet troop occupation. Meanwhile, Armenia was embittered by what it viewed as a trend of too little—too late by Moscow. Soviet troops stood idle during the worst atrocities only to launch a botched intervention once the violence was over.¹¹⁶

In Armenia, 1990 saw marked growth in political support for Armenian nationalists in politics while separate parallel developments were occurring among military forces. On 4 August, Armenia elected its first non-communist leader, Levon Ter-Petrosyan from the Armenian National Movement (ANM). Only weeks later, on 23 August, the Armenian parliament passed a resolution on national sovereignty, marking a significant movement toward independence. A number of unofficial militias emerged over the course of the year and grew to compete in power with political leadership.

¹¹³ Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 24.

¹¹⁴ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 89–90; Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 24.

¹¹⁵ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 93.

¹¹⁶ Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 24; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 37–38; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 92–93.

Militia operations became focused on capturing arms and ammunition from the Soviet military, while some reports suggest Armenia was also receiving arms shipments from abroad and transporting them to Karabakh.¹¹⁷ Growth of militias and organization of troops was not limited to the Armenians. The year the followed marked a distinct shift in the type of violence between the two parties. What had been relatively unorganized and localized fighting in prior years was turning into more intense contact between structured armed units. Controlling the inertia of armed Armenian militias proved to be Ter-Petrosyan's greatest challenge in subsequent years.¹¹⁸

O. OPERATION RING

The results of the March 1991 Soviet referendum on the preservation of the union shifted Moscow's support heavily in favor of Azerbaijan both politically and militarily. Azerbaijan participated in the referendum, voting for the continuation of the Soviet Union. Armenia was among the six republics that abstained, announcing that it would instead hold its own referendum on independence in September. Moscow's reaction to Armenian dissent was to put pressure on one of Armenia's critical vulnerabilities, the Armenian population within Azerbaijan. Operation Ring, a joint Russian Army and Azerbaijan police operation, was launched on 30 April ostensibly to halt illegal Armenian migration into Azerbaijan. An operation designed to deter the movement of armed factions resulted in nothing less than a small civil war that violently forced Armenian civilians to leave 24 villages on the northern border of Karabakh. Azerbaijani refugees that had previously fled Armenia were repopulated in the villages left vacant by Operation Ring.¹¹⁹

Operation Ring was an Azerbaijani military victory but a political defeat. Moscow's intent to dissuade Armenia from seeking independence was not realized, and Karabakh Armenians became further hardened against any possibility of living under Azerbaijani rule. Furthermore, the brutality of the operation in the eyes of a new Russian

¹¹⁷ Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 25.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 38–40; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 111–12.

¹¹⁹ Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 26; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 40–42; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 113–17.

parliament shifted its support in favor of Armenia. The new parliamentary speaker, Boris Yeltsin, was beginning to view Azerbaijan as a threat to state security.¹²⁰

P. MEDIATION IS ATTEMPTED WHILE THE SOVIET UNION COLLAPSES

Moscow's control over the conflict in the South Caucasus grew weaker as the Soviet state began to crumble. The failed August coup in Moscow was followed by withdrawal of Soviet military units from Nagorno-Karabakh that led to an increase in the level of violence. Azerbaijan declared independence on 30 August followed by Karabakh's announcement of secession from Azerbaijan on 2 September. Armenia followed, declaring their independence on 23 September. The Soviet Union was consumed by existential concerns, but that did not dissuade Russia from attempting to broker a deal.¹²¹

With little authority left to the state of the Soviet Union following the coup attempt, the presidents of Russia and Kazakhstan attempted to mediate a settlement that would bring an end to the regional conflict. On 22 September, Boris Yeltsin and Nursultan Nazarbayev sat down with representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh with the precondition that territorial integrity of the states would be maintained. In this context, Armenia renounced its claims on Azerbaijan territory. In this way the conflict was transformed in a superficially legal way to a dispute only between Azerbaijan and Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. Terms of the settlement began with a ceasefire and included restoring the governing structure in Karabakh that existed before 1989. Future talks were to occur that would bring about a final political solution. Fighting persisted in Karabakh despite the agreement, but talks continued until mid-November. On 4 November, Azerbaijan cut a critical gas pipeline to Armenia that crippled Yerevan, and on 20 November, an Armenian rocket shot down an Azerbaijani helicopter. Twenty-two people were killed in the crash including the Deputy Prime

¹²⁰ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 42; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 114.

¹²¹ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 43–45; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 160–61.

Minister and Interior Minister of Azerbaijan and Russian and Kazakhstani observers to the peace talks. The Russian-Kazakhstani peace initiative was abandoned.¹²²

Q. THE SOVIET UNION FALLS AND FULL SCALE WAR ERUPTS

The fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991 led to a new, more devastating, phase of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Soviet units were pulled out of the South Caucasus on the eve of the Soviet Union's demise, leaving not only a power vacuum but also a large number of recently unemployed soldiers and an astounding amount of military hardware. Moreover, what was once an intrastate conflict had instantly become international. In so far as Soviet troops acted as a military buffer, and Moscow politics provided a diversion and hope for a negotiated settlement, their absence brought about unrestrained violence and full-scale war in no time at all. Armenians, confined largely to Stepanakert, had their eyes set on Khojaly and the occupation of Karabakh's only airport. The attack that began on the night of 25 February 1992, on the fourth anniversary of the Sumgait pogroms, bore witness to the most atrocious brutality of the war, with civilian casualty estimates as high as 1000.¹²³

R. DOMESTIC POLITICAL UNREST BEGINS IN BAKU

Azerbaijan's losses in Khojaly brought political turmoil to Baku that would last four long months, led to four changes of power, and significantly detract from its war efforts. Angry demonstrators numbering over 80,000 called for President Ayaz Mutalibov's ouster for the failings of the government in handling the Nagorno-Karabakh situation.¹²⁴ Mutalibov stepped down on 5 March, replaced by parliament speaker Yaqub Mamedov, awaiting presidential elections in June. In the months that followed, Azerbaijani domestic politics became closely linked with military power and events on the battlefield.¹²⁵

¹²² Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 44–45; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 161–62.

¹²³ Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 32; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 46–47; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 169–71.

¹²⁴ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 78.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 78–79; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 172–73.

S. IRANIAN CEASEFIRE COLLAPSES / ARMENIANS TAKE SHUSHA

A cease-fire, brokered by Iran in mid-March, held for just over a week before Azerbaijan resumed targeting Stepanakert with artillery from Shusha on 29 March. An Armenian assault on Shusha led to its eventual capture on 9 May, coinciding with a meeting in Tehran where President Levon Ter-Petrosyan of Armenia and Interim President Mamedov of Azerbaijan had just discussed the general principles for a peace agreement. The international ridicule surrounding Tehran's inability to broker a deal led Iran to resign as mediator.¹²⁶

Shusha was significant to Azerbaijan for several reasons, and its loss sparked a new round of political upheaval. Not only was Shusha the last remaining Azerbaijani stronghold, due to its location on a high plateau, the terrain was strategic from a military perspective. Shusha was also considered the "cradle of Azerbaijani culture," and its loss invoked an emotional response in Azerbaijan.¹²⁷ From 14 to 15 May, using the defeat in Shusha as a springboard, former communist party officials staged a coup that restored Ayaz Mutalibov to office. Citing the results of an investigation that cleared Mutalibov of any wrongdoing in the Khojaly affair, they claimed that the position was rightfully his. Mutalibov subsequently canceled the presidential election that was to take place the following month. The next day, a counter coup by the Azerbaijan's nationalist opposition seized the parliament building with the support of armor and troops, again ousting Mutalibov. Presidential elections took place on 7 June as scheduled where the Popular Front leader, Abulfaz Elchibey, was elected.¹²⁸

The political strife in Baku created a distraction that drew Azerbaijani military forces away from Karabakh and facilitated Armenia's successful 17 May assault on Lachin. Control of Lachin meant control of the mountain pass corridor connecting Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh. By the end of the month Armenians had firm control of

¹²⁶ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 79; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 179–80.

¹²⁷ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 180.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 180–82; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 79.

the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as a physical line of communication with Armenia. Armenian territorial ambitions had been realized and the possibility of losing what it had gained seemed remote.¹²⁹

T. INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS HEIGHTEN

The international involvement by Iran through mediation in March was just the beginning of third-party involvement in this ongoing conflict. Public opinion in Turkey put substantial pressure on Turkey's Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel, to support Azerbaijan in the conflict. Understanding the complexity of the problem, Demirel was able to maintain a balanced approach, but when Armenian forces attacked into Nakhichevan in May 1992 that balance changed. Turkey promised aid to Nakhichevan and made a public statement that Armenia's aggression would not be tolerated. Russia responded that "third party intervention in the dispute could trigger a Third World War," citing the Treaty of Collective Security in the Tashkent agreement that had been signed just days prior.¹³⁰

U. AZERBAIJAN LAUNCHES COUNTER-OFFENSIVE AS CSCE FORMS MINSK GROUP

An Azerbaijani summer counter-offensive was launched following the election of Abulfaz Elchibey in June of 1992, catching Armenians by surprise. By September of the same year Azerbaijan had captured Shaumian, Martakert, the eastern flank of Kelbajar, and the village of Srkhavend north of Stepanakert. Half of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh was again under the control of Azerbaijan after a period of fighting that, curiously, saw Russian troops supporting both sides of battle.¹³¹

As Azerbaijan was taking back territory, groundwork was being laid in Rome by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) to begin mediation in the dispute. A multilateral conference convened between Belarus, Czechoslovakia, France,

¹²⁹ Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 33; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 80; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 182–83.

¹³⁰ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 80–81.

¹³¹ Ibid., 80, 82–85; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 194–96, 209–10.

Germany, Italy, Russia, Sweden, Turkey and the United States that became known as the Minsk Group. The group's name comes from the peace conference that was to have taken place in Minsk but due to irreconcilable differences never happened. There were two leading factors that led to failed talks. First, Azerbaijan refused to recognize Karabakh Armenians as a party to the dispute, insisting that the conflict was only between Azerbaijan and Armenia, with Armenia representing the interests of Karabakh. Second, Armenia insisted that the impending legal status of Karabakh should only be discussed after peace had been achieved. Conversely, Azerbaijan refused to agree on the deployment of a peacekeeping force, believing it would undermine Azerbaijani sovereignty thereby prejudicing the final determination. Aside from the fundamentally opposed positions of the parties, the mediators themselves were not prepared to make peace. There was a general ignorance and ambivalence surrounding the peace process that plagued it from the very start. Mediators were more interested in competing among themselves than seeking resolution between Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹³²

V. KARABAKH ARMENIANS RESTRUCTURE FORCES AND PUSH OUTSIDE OF KARABAKH

Facing the immense military setbacks and the prospect of continued Azerbaijani advances, Robert Kocharyan took the lead of a new Karabakh State Defense Committee on 15 August 1992. As the former head of the "Ideological Section" of a radical Armenian nationalist group known as Krunk, Kocharyan had become the leader of Nagorno-Karabakh and would go on to become the president of Armenia.¹³³ The State Defense Committee, created in the spirit of the 1941 Stalinist committee by the same name, assumed total control of the state. All military-aged males were conscripted into the Karabakh Army and all businesses in Karabakh were subordinated to the war effort. Serzh Sarkisyan, who later served as Armenian prime minister under Kocharyan and is currently the President of Armenia, took charge of logistics.¹³⁴

¹³² Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 85–86; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 228–31.

¹³³ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 79.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 196–97.

Under the leadership of the State Defense Committee, Karabakh Armenians realized significant gains in the opening months of 1993. At the end of March, Armenian forces again controlled the majority of Karabakh and won back control of the Lachin corridor. This time, however, the Armenian advance did not stop with the conquest of Karabakh and control of Lachin. Armenian forces advanced westward in early April, taking control of Kelbajar and opening another corridor between Armenia and Karabakh. This bold move set in motion a strategy that created a massive humanitarian crisis. Azerbaijan scrambled in an unsuccessful attempt to evacuate women and children from a city of 62,000 by helicopter. While thousands of Kelbajar residents were fleeing on foot through the snow-covered mountains, Armenians opened a second front to the south on 4 April to capture Fizuli and isolate southwest Azerbaijan from the rest of the republic.¹³⁵

Offensive operations outside of Karabakh deepened the divide between President Ter-Petrosyan, who favored a diplomatic settlement, and Defense Minister Vazgen Manukyan, who supported Karabakh in capitalizing on a military advantage. Acting on his own initiative, beyond the limits briefed to Ter-Petrosyan, Manukyan damaged Ter-Petrosyan's credibility and further spoiled the opportunity for a diplomatic settlement. Ter-Petrosyan even sent requests to Kocharyan to stop the assault, to no avail. These operations provided the international community the first convincing evidence that the Republic of Armenia had conducted offensive operations within Azerbaijan and outside of Karabakh. Further allegations arose that Russia's Seventh Army also assisted in capturing Azerbaijani territory.¹³⁶

W. INTERNATIONAL OUTRAGE TO ARMENIAN AGGRESSION

The aggressive strategy adopted by Karabakh forces, in taking territory outside of Karabakh, created an international uproar. Statements by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the United States expressed alarm and concern, calling for the end of hostilities and the return of territory to Azerbaijan. On 3 April, Turkey completely closed its borders to Armenia and prevented any international aid to Armenia from

¹³⁵ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 86–87; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 211–13.

¹³⁶ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 212–13.

transiting its territory. Days later, Ankara ordered troops to take up alert positions on the Armenian border and stated its willingness to use military force if necessary. Armenia responded, with support from Moscow, by reinforcing its border to Turkey with Russian army units. Meanwhile, Iran was disturbed that hostilities in Fizuli had moved so close to its borders. President Rafsanjani voiced his concern on 12 April, calling on Armenia to stop killing innocent people and withdraw. On 30 April, the UNSC passed resolution 822 calling for a ceasefire and withdraw from Kelbajar and other territory outside of Nagorno-Karabakh.¹³⁷

X. ANOTHER ATTEMPT AT PEACE AMID DOMESTIC TURMOIL IN AZERBAIJAN

Another attempt at peace was brokered between Russia, Turkey and the United States in an agreement that conformed to resolution 822. After slight modifications Azerbaijan and Armenia found agreement, and with a great deal of persuasion by Ter-Petrosyan Karabakh accepted on 14 June. Karabakh requested a delay in implementation of the agreement for a month, perhaps with some knowledge of political developments in Baku. Ultimately, political discord in Azerbaijan rendered the agreement void.¹³⁸

In June 1993, Azerbaijan was again experiencing domestic political unrest. Earlier in the year, concerned about thinning public support, sluggish economy, prolonged conflict, and rampant corruption, President Elchibey believed that the greatest threat to his position lay in Colonel Surat Huseinov. Huseinov was the most successful and charismatic military commander in the war and drew a substantial following in a number of towns surrounding Karabakh. Additionally, Huseinov had suspicious connections to Moscow.¹³⁹ Seizing on a military defeat, Elchibey relieved him of command in February and dismissed him from the Popular Front party. Huseinov and his loyal troops subsequently took control of Ganja and its outlying villages and demanded that Elchibey step down. On 19 June, when Huseinov's troops began the march to Baku, Elchibey fled. Heydar Aliyev, a popular communist leader and recently elected chairman

¹³⁷ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 87–89; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 213.

¹³⁸ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 89; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 213.

¹³⁹ Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 33–34.

of the Supreme Soviet, assumed control of the government and brokered a power-sharing agreement in which Huseinov became prime minister and head of the military. Three months later, on 24 September 1993, Azerbaijan joined the Russian led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).¹⁴⁰

Russia's role in controlling what it considered its sphere of influence was prominent in Azerbaijan's June regime change. Elchibey's alignment with Turkey against Russia, his pending agreement with Western oil companies that would launch exploration in the Caspian Sea and build pipelines through Turkey, Russia's interest in basing troops in Azerbaijan, and the ongoing conflict wherein Russia was siding heavily with Armenia were all issues of Russian national interests. Huseinov's status in Azerbaijan and his connections to Moscow made him ideally suited to take power, but he lacked the political experience to become head of state. Furthermore, Russia provided Huseinov the means by which to orchestrate a coup. When Russia's 104th airborne regiment pulled out of Ganja in late May, six months ahead of schedule, it passed nearly all of its weapons to Huseinov to equip his forces. By mid-1993, Russia's foreign policy focused on controlling its "near abroad" was strengthening.¹⁴¹

Y. ARMENIANS ADVANCE CREATES GREATER HUMANITARIAN DISASTER

Karabakh Armenians took advantage of Azerbaijan's political chaos in June to launch a protracted but successful assault on Agdam, east of Karabakh. Armenian momentum continued throughout the summer and into the fall as Armenians captured more territory outside of Karabakh. By the end of August, Karabakh Armenians held Martakert, Fizuli, Jebrail, and Kubatly. In late October, Armenians took Goradiz and Zangelan. By December, Armenians controlled nearly 100 miles of Azerbaijan's border with Iran.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 33–37; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 89–92; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 213–14.

¹⁴¹ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 91; Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, 33–38.

¹⁴² Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 94–95; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 215–16, 27.

Conditions seemed favorable to strike a peace deal in late 1993, but the inertia of war made it virtually impossible. Karabakh Armenians controlled nearly 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory that included two land routes to Armenia and a substantial buffer zone around Nagorno-Karabakh that placed its population out of the range of artillery. It appeared that Karabakh Armenians had a nearly ideal position from which to control peace talks, and Azerbaijan's new president could politically withstand making a compromise by laying blame for lost territory on the previous regime. Unfortunately, Ter-Petrosyan was in no position to broker a deal that he could not guarantee. He had essentially lost control of Armenian forces that were caught in the momentum of their victories.¹⁴³

Aggressive Armenian expansion along the Iranian border raised international concern that a larger regional war could erupt. As fighting continued in southern Azerbaijan, the geometry of the combat zone forced fleeing civilians into Iran. In order to keep refugees from flooding over the border, Tehran sent troops into Azerbaijan to secure a safe zone for humanitarian relief. This apparent violation of Azerbaijan sovereignty invited international scrutiny and raised security concerns by Turkey. Turkey responded by upping its troop strength along its Armenian border. Russia issued a statement condemning the action and cautioned Iran that it had escalated and internationalized the conflict. As tensions rose, and the possibility for greater regional war was looming, the UNSC drafted another resolution. On 14 October 1993, Resolution 874 condemned the fighting and again called for a ceasefire, but also insisted that regional states refrain from action that would broaden the conflict.¹⁴⁴

Z. AZERBAIJAN TAKES A FINAL STAND

In Azerbaijan, military losses compounded President Aliyev's fragile political position. On 11 December, Aliyev went on national television for several hours blaming military leaders by name for losses and condemning them for betraying their country. Aliyev was effectively weakening the political credibility of any military leader who

¹⁴³ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 95; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 226–27.

¹⁴⁴ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 93–94.

could pose a threat to the presidency. His political maneuvering also significantly impeded the war effort. He disbanded 33 battalions believed to be loyal to the Popular Front and replaced those 10,000 seasoned veterans with at least as many new young conscripts.¹⁴⁵

The most brutal fighting of the war was seen at the very end, starting in December 1993, as Azerbaijan began a new offensive. Armenian troops pushing east out of Fizuli met with exceptional resistance from Azerbaijan forces. As the Armenians pulled back, they were attacked on two more fronts. Azerbaijan troops captured the rail junction in Goradiz, and a third attack much farther north took back terrain in Martakert. In late December, Azerbaijani troops attacked near Agdam forcing Armenian forces out of strategically advantageous terrain overlooking the city. With artillery in place that could range most of eastern Karabakh, Azeri forces made a push for the heart of Karabakh. Azeri units pushed into the Mardakert and Askeran districts on 9 January and moved within 11 miles of Stepanakert. Simultaneously, Azeri forces took back the city of Goradiz and the 25 mile stretch of border along the Aras River while a separate unit temporarily controlled the Omar Pass, the northern corridor between Karabakh and Armenia.¹⁴⁶

Azerbaijani's military successes began to fade in early February as soldiers weary from extensive offensive operations encountered heavy snowfalls. Disorganized units of retreating soldiers became easy targets for the Armenians. In late February, two entire Azerbaijani brigades were isolated while attempting to push through the Omar Pass in Kelbajar and lost as many as 1,500 troops to Armenian grad missiles.¹⁴⁷ Desertion was such a problem among Azerbaijani troops that Aliyev ordered that all soldiers attempting to escape were to be shot.¹⁴⁸ For such a high number of casualties, Azerbaijan's winter offensive recaptured very little territory.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 225–26.

¹⁴⁶ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 95–96; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 236.

¹⁴⁷ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 237.

¹⁴⁸ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 96.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 95–96; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 236–37.

AA. CEASEFIRE

At the peak of hostilities in February, Representatives of the Minsk Group traveled repeatedly to the region in an attempt to broker a peace settlement. Swedish chairman, Jan Eliasson, and Russian envoy, Vladimir Kazimirov, became the primary representatives in what became a highly competitive process. Kazimirov won out, acting on behalf of Russia in a unilateral capacity, striking an agreement for a ceasefire with all sides. On 4 May a delegation of representative from CIS countries as well as a representative from Nagorno-Karabakh met in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, to draft an agreement that called for a ceasefire and Russian peacekeeping forces to be deployed to Karabakh. The ceasefire went into effect at midnight of 12 May and holds to this day. On 16 May, Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev held a meeting with the military leaders of all three parties insisting that they each sign the ceasefire agreement that had already successfully been in place for four days. Azerbaijan's defense minister, General Mamedov refused to accept the plan for Russian peacekeepers but upheld Azerbaijan's commitment to the ceasefire.¹⁵⁰

BB. SUCCESS OF RUSSIAN MEDIATION

The primary reason that Russia emerged as the successful solitary mediator rests with interests and leverage. Russia was interested in maintaining influence in its near abroad, which it believed it would accomplish by excluding western states from taking part in peace talks. Russia wanted to base troops in Azerbaijan, which it believed could be accomplished through a peacekeeping force. There was also a great deal of interest in Azerbaijani energy exports that perhaps Russia believed it could tap into if it maintained greater authority over Azerbaijan through military occupation. Moscow emerged as the sole mediator principally because it controlled levers of influence that proved effective in bringing about a ceasefire. Armenia was increasingly reliant on Russia for weapons and ammunition. Just weeks before mediation began in earnest, President Ter-Petrosyan arranged a private audience with Russian President Boris Yeltsin to discuss a deal in which Armenia would receive the required weapons to restore Armenian forces to its full

¹⁵⁰ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 237–40.

operating strength.¹⁵¹ For Azerbaijan, the biggest concern was losing more territory if the fighting continued. As talks began in 1994, Kazimirov warned Aliyev, “if you don’t allow Russian peace-keeping battalions between the Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, in a month’s time the Armenians will take Ganja, Terter, Barda, and the railway leading to Georgia.”¹⁵² This illumination of possible worst-case scenarios should be expected of any good mediator. In the case of Russia, who could actively control the outcome by bolstering Armenian forces, this statement proved particularly coercive leverage.

An element that must not be overlooked is timing. There were many occasions over the course of the war when it seemed like conditions were favorable, yet the parties made no effort to meet. There were instances when a deal was close but fell through before it was either signed or implemented. Other times a ceasefire went into effect but did not hold. Ultimately, it was exhaustion that led both sides to put down arms. It was a condition of mutually hurting stalemate whereby each side felt it had more to gain by stopping than it would in continuing the fight that allowed a settlement to be reached. Russia’s leverage in the 1994 ceasefire was severely limited and directly related to timing and exhaustion. Once the ceasefire was in effect, there was no more pressure that Russia could reasonably assert to bring about a final solution.

CC. CONCLUSION

Investigating the history of this conflict reveals several underlying themes that contribute to its intractability. Foremost is the concept of identity and ethnic nationalism. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan believe that Karabakh is a critical part of their cultural past that must be preserved as part of their identity. For many Azerbaijanis, who have been forced from their homes by the war, this is more than a historical piece of their identity. The Karabakh War hardened these prevailing beliefs among Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Both sides experienced devastating losses of resources, homes, countrymen, and family members that reinforced the sacred value imparted on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. The more that was invested in the war effort, the more each side was committed to

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 237–38.

¹⁵² Ibid., 238.

victory. Over the course of the longstanding ceasefire, the conditions of exhaustion that precipitated a halt in fighting have long since faded, but the sense of loss incurred by both sides remains. Neither is willing to forgo their nation's sacrifices to compromise.

Supporting nationalist sentiments is the belief by each nation that their claim to the territory is legitimate and that their actions are justified. Each nation believes in their version of history that proves they are the rightful heirs to Karabakh. Conflicting territorial claims, along with the predominantly Armenian demographic of Karabakh, have transformed into equally compelling arguments: one of territorial integrity by Azerbaijan and that of national self-determination by Karabakh Armenians. While both sides present a persuasive case, this debate is not unique to Karabakh. Moreover, international law is discordant on these principles. While self-determination is considered a *sine qua non* for state legitimacy, the international community frowns on the forcible division of states. The Charter of the United Nations upholds both principles in its first two articles.¹⁵³

Political elite and military leaders rose out of the conflict that supported, and in many ways perpetuated, the conflict. Exploiting nationalist sentiments, rising leaders that had demonstrated their patriotism during the war were quickly elevated to higher offices. In order to remain in office, or compete with an incumbent, bellicose rhetoric and nationalist propaganda was required to keep the conflict in the political spotlight. Perpetual propaganda, in turn, reinforces nationalist sentiments thus creating a perpetual cycle.

The conflict over Karabakh has involved varying levels of international involvement over its evolution. Circumstances that faced Armenia and Azerbaijan from the October Revolution through the end of the civil war were those of large empires using small states as instruments in a contest of regional domination; each action that pitted territorial disputes against one another exacerbated the pain of integration. Some historians saw Stalin's decision to award Karabakh to Azerbaijan as part of a divide-and-

¹⁵³ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*. (San Francisco: United Nations, 1945), 3.

rule strategy to ensure loyalty to the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁴ Others saw the decision by the Caucasus Bureau as a method to appease Azerbaijan, whose cooperation as a Muslim dominated republic could entice other Muslim nations to join the communist revolution.¹⁵⁵ However one interprets the decision to place an autonomous Karabakh within Azerbaijan, the fact that a narrow strip of land was established between Karabakh and Armenia demonstrates that a deliberate decision was made to separate these Armenian populations without any attempt to resolve the dispute.

With the reemergence of the conflict during the fall of the Soviet Union, the conflict again developed an international component. Russia assumed a prominent role in its post-Soviet sphere of influence, and the bordering states of Iran and Turkey became concerned for border security and refugee migrations. Armenia's continuous direct support to Karabakh, alleged Russian troop involvement in combat operations, border incursions by Iran into Azerbaijan, a blockade on Armenia by Turkey, and four UNSC resolutions put this conflict firmly on the international stage. Mediators flooded to the region and began competing for influence in these newly independent states. Regional and global powers were interested in the strategic placement of troops, denial of access to adversaries, international trade and investment opportunities, access to oil and gas, maintaining transit corridors, and arms sales. Alliances and partnerships formed that eventually embedded the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in a larger regional competition for power and influence.

Over the evolution of this dispute, elements of conflict have developed simultaneously at the levels of the individual elite, the nation, and the international system. Factors on all three planes resonate harmonically with each other, creating a cumulative intractability with which modern day mediators must contend. If any international mediator is to be effective in bringing about a final resolution to this conflict, they must acquire the proper leverage with which they can break the perpetual cycles of intractability that have developed throughout its history.

¹⁵⁴ Audrey L. Altstadt, "Nagorno-Karabagh – 'Apple of Discord' in the Azerbaijan SSR," *Central Asian Survey* 7, no. 4 (1998): 68; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 130–31; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 20.

¹⁵⁵ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 130.

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IV. CONFLICT AT THE LEVEL OF THE ELITE AND THE NATION

The war over Nagorno-Karabakh and the resulting condition of no war and no peace has had a profound effect on both the Azerbaijani and Armenian populations and the ruling elite of both nations. A ceasefire without final resolution has created a structure that has transformed the worldviews of both societies and altered the political landscape. The national identity of each group has grown stronger in opposition to one another, and sacred values tied to territory have grown more intransigent. Both nations continue to drift further away from those nascent democratic ideals that were inspired by their independence from the Soviet Union. Regimes in both Armenia and Azerbaijan have grown more authoritarian over the last two decades as the governments have become mired in corruption, and political elites' vying for power have exploited the ongoing conflict for personal gain. At the same time that mediation has been bogged down by competition at the international level, the immobile framework of unresolved war has similarly hampered attempts at economic integration and informal diplomacy. Only through liberal democratic reform could both nations ultimately find compromise, yet these reforms are also thwarted by a number of factors surrounding the existing state of affairs.

A. ETHNIC CONSOLIDATION

One of the most immediate impacts of the war on society was the demographic change that took place in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ethnic cleansing during the war was followed by a decade of outward migration from both countries after the end of hostilities. Nearly one million people living in Armenia migrated to Russia, the United States, Ukraine, Belarus, or other Western European destinations between 1990 and 2001.¹⁵⁶ More than 600,000 minorities living in Azerbaijan fled during the conflict, while in 1993 the Azerbaijan State Statistical Department recorded a population of 779,000 displaced persons from the Armenian occupation of the seven regions

¹⁵⁶ Laura Baghdasarian and Arif Yunusov, "War, Social Change and 'No War, No Peace' Syndromes in Azerbaijani and Armenian Societies," *Accord* 17 (2005): 54.

surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁵⁷ The ethnic homogeneity created by this conflict has not changed in the decades since. Armenia is currently 97.9 percent ethnically Armenian, and Azerbaijan is 90.6 percent ethnically Azeri.¹⁵⁸

The onset of renewed conflict in the 1980s also began the ongoing process of greater integration between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. Presently, there is no law in Karabakh that identifies conditions for citizenship. Citizens carry Armenian passports and do business with Armenian currency, the dram. Armenian conscripts have served in Karabakh since the beginning of the war, the military command in Karabakh is under implicit control from the Armenian Ministry of Defense, and Armenia's constitution, drafted in 2006, specifically emphasizes the unity of all Armenians. Karabakh's budget is heavily subsidized by Armenia, its tax law is synchronized with Armenia, and Yerevan pays the salaries of university professors and media workers in Karabakh. Armenia and Karabakh share common telecommunication and transportation infrastructures and are legally bound by a May 1998 protocol on consultation and cooperation and a September 2000 economic cooperation agreement. Moreover, a significant part of the Armenian population envisions Nagorno-Karabakh will eventually be part of Armenia. While there are some distinct differences between the populations of the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, it is difficult to say that there is a separate political community. It is inconsistent within this political discourse that there would ever be two Armenias. Independence for Karabakh is only a tactical step toward ultimate reunification with Armenia.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ "CIA World Fact Book: Azerbaijan;" "CIA World Fact Book: Armenia," United States Central Intelligence Agency, last modified September 10, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/am.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Eiki Berg and Martin Mölder, "Who is Entitled to 'Earn Sovereignty'? Legitimacy and Regime Support in Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 3 (2012): 534–35; Razmik Panossian, "The Irony of Nagorno-Karabakh: Formal Institutions versus Informal Politics," *Regional and Federal Studies* 11, no. 3 (2001): 151.

B. THE SOCIAL BURDEN OF CONFLICT: ALTERING THE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The ethnic uniformity of each post-war state created conditions by which suffering associated with the war and ensuing status quo could be attributed not only to the other state but also the opposing ethnic nation. Shared beliefs on both sides of the conflict are critical elements leading to intractability. Political Psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal asserts that to continue a conflict, society must share a belief that they have both human and material resources to endure and that time is in their favor.¹⁶⁰ Considering the economic and social costs associated with this frozen conflict, this is equally applicable to the standoff over Nagorno-Karabakh. Each side must continue to believe that over time continuing the conflict will improve the eventual settlement or even lead to total victory.

In order for a society to continue supporting the conflict it must adapt in the ways it meets its basic human needs. Prolonged and intractable conflicts bring hardship in varying ways and intensities to the societies involved, from economic sacrifice to the loss of loved ones. Society must develop mechanisms to deal with the stress and hardships of austerity and the looming fear for their safety. The psychological adaptations required to sustain an intractable conflict include development of strong solidarity and loyalty to one's nation, desire to participate, and preparedness for personal sacrifice not to mention tenacity, bravery, and resolve. Experiencing shared fear and hardship unites a society in a communal in-group, sharing a common identity and ideology that give meaning and understanding to the conflict. The longer that conflict persists the stronger this societal bond grows and the more intractable the conflict becomes.¹⁶¹

Societal beliefs that grow out of intractable conflict begin with the justness of the group's goals. As conditions get more challenging the justness of a group's goals grow more resolute. These goals may be existential in nature, but they also provide an explanation to the society about why they are fighting and suffering. Second, beliefs

¹⁶⁰ Daniel Bar-Tal, "Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts," *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 11 (2007): 1434.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1434–35.

about security emerge as a significant societal concern that influences virtually every decision the group makes. National survival becomes the preeminent concern that subordinates every other domain of life. Societies will develop beliefs that dehumanize and delegitimize the enemy and explain an opponent's actions in a way that glorifies one's own society. Perpetuating beliefs that sustain the group's positive self-image becomes increasingly important to society, with a tendency toward ethnocentrism. Frequently beliefs that the opponent has victimized the society arise, maintaining that the adversary inflicted the conflict. Social beliefs about unity and patriotism grow as well as beliefs about peace. Societies perpetuate a belief that their ultimate goal is peace, which provides solace and optimism that an end will come when their lives will be better. Because these beliefs are so critical to maintaining solidarity and continuing conflict, societies go to great lengths to impart them on their members to the extent that those who reject them are viewed as traitors.¹⁶²

These social beliefs and bonds that Bar-Tal refers to as the sociopsychological infrastructure are institutionalized through family interaction, public education, and mass media. Children who grow out of a society in conflict, exposed to the same books, movies, television programs, and political conversation, become adults who take part in a public discourse based on the same world view. The beliefs that hold a society together through conflict constitute the ideology that also perpetuates violence and hinders resolution. School curriculum, mass media, and internet news sources in both Armenia and Azerbaijan lionize their own glorified version of history and in so doing paint the other as an irreconcilable enemy. Over the course of the two decades, this has eroded all trust between the people of these two nations. Sona Dilanyan, a youth activist in Armenia, explains that even though the younger generation in both countries have not directly experienced the war, their viewpoints have been formatively influence by state propaganda and the negative images held by their respective societies.¹⁶³ The strength of

¹⁶² Daniel Bar-Tal, "Societal Beliefs in Times of Intractable Conflict: The Israeli Case," *International Journal of Conflict Management* 9, no. 1 (1998): 26–30.

¹⁶³ Geysar Gurbanov, "Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh: the Role of Youth and Democracy," *Caucasus Edition: Journal of Conflict Transformation* (February 2012), <http://caucasusedition.net/analysis/peace-in-nagorno-karabakh-the-role-of-youth-and-democracy/>.

these sacred values are illustrated in a quote from Arkady Gukasian, president of Nagorno-Karabakh, on 7 October 1997: “However badly the people live, there are holy things, there are positions that they will never surrender under any circumstances.”¹⁶⁴

The militarization of societies on both sides of the conflict is a result of the realistic possibility of war, but also perpetuates militaristic and nationalistic sentiments that prolong the conflict. The patriotic public on both sides of the conflict view militarization and an arms buildup as a necessity to face the threat of another impending war. Azerbaijan has to be prepared to take back its territory, and Armenia must be ready to defend what it has conquered. Both sides see themselves as the most likely victor in another war, unconnected to any other political, social, or economic factor. This allegiance has become so strong that expressing caution toward militarism in either country is offensive. Many Armenians believe that the army, as the victor in the war, has earned the right to be trusted. The prominent position in Azerbaijan is that too much oversight of the military will limit its capabilities to win back territory lost to Armenia. The large numbers of military volunteers that served during the war have filtered back into society as heroic veterans and have taken membership in organizations that educate the youth and pass along patriotic traditions.¹⁶⁵

C. THE RISE OF COMPETITIVE ETHNO-POLITICS

The sociopsychological infrastructure in both Armenia and Azerbaijan developed in tandem with the political movements in these countries as they faced the prospect of independence from the Soviet Union. Jack Levy describes the ensuing phenomenon as an “ethnic security dilemma” in an “emerging anarchy” and Michael Ignatieff calls it,

¹⁶⁴ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 260; Bar-Tal, “Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts,” 1444–45; Bar-Tal, “Societal Beliefs in Times of Intractable Conflict,” 30; Hashim Gafarov, “Warmongering as State Propaganda and its Effect on the Eventual Resolution of the Nagorno- Karabakh Conflict,” *Caucasus Edition: Journal of Conflict Transformation*, July (2010), <http://caucasusedition.net/analysis/warmongering-as-state-propaganda-and-its-effect-on-the-eventual-resolution-of-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict/>.

¹⁶⁵ Baghdasarian and Yunusov, “War, Social Change and ‘No War, No Peace’ Syndromes in Azerbaijani and Armenian Societies,” 54–55.

“the Hobbesian world of interethnic war.”¹⁶⁶ As the Soviet Union began to crumble, Azerbaijan and Armenia were both faced with individual concerns for their own security. Without the structure of the Soviet Union that made interethnic accommodation possible, nationalist factions formed that cultivated fear. Ignatieff explains, “People become ‘nationalistic’ when they are afraid; when the only answer to the question ‘Who will protect me now?’ becomes ‘my own people.’”¹⁶⁷

With the fall of the Soviet Union, so fell the national discourse of each country. The communist ideology had crumbled along with the Soviet identity leaving nothing immediately in its place. Political elites found themselves in positions to develop new discourses and strengthen national identities. The discourses that developed, true to the form of emerging anarchy, helped the rising elite of each newly independent country legitimize their own rule. By seizing on the popular concerns for ethnonational security, elites in both countries established authoritarian regimes that were resistant to opposition movements in the name of national security. Ethnicity was politicized and became the main political identity, and as such Azerbaijanis and Armenians each saw the other as impediments to the realization of their own national identity. The identities constructed on both sides of the conflict made it virtually impossible to sell the idea of compromise to a domestic audience.¹⁶⁸

The first political elections occurred in the shadow of the conflict and influenced the shape of democracy in both countries at its very inception. Initially democratization led to strong nationalism. Both countries experienced significant political participation but developed weak democratic institutions. Limited interaction with western nations,

¹⁶⁶ Levy, “Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War,” 8–9; Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, 1st American ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 45.

¹⁶⁷ Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor*, 45.

¹⁶⁸ Behlül Özkan, “Who Gains from the “No War No Peace” Situation? A Critical Analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” *Geopolitics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 574, 78, 83.

Russian influence in the region, and a 70-year history of communism made the Russian style of sovereign democracy the favored model of government by the elites of both countries.¹⁶⁹

The semi-authoritarianism established under Heydar Aliyev combined a pragmatic approach toward Russia with economic ties to western oil companies, but also cultivated patronage relationships with regional clans and brought elites from Aliyev's inner circle to prominent positions in the government, making conditions ripe for corruption.¹⁷⁰ A Soviet style cult of personality developed in Azerbaijan that is still prevalent today, with portraits, quotes, and statues of Heydar Aliyev plastered to billboards and walls throughout the country and abroad.¹⁷¹ Baku's airport is named in his honor as well as a Cultural Center worth an estimated \$250 million, and this year the first movie in a trilogy honoring the late leader is being released in Azerbaijan.¹⁷² Ilham Aliyev, Heydar's son and presidential successor, has continued to perpetuate and capitalize on the cult of his father, gaining legitimacy of his own through billboards depicting the images of Heydar and Ilham together in consultative poses with the Azerbaijan flag as a backdrop.¹⁷³

Following the war, the political elites of Nagorno-Karabakh gained prominent status in Armenia and have risen to positions of power. Robert Kocharyan, one of the principal leaders of the Karabakh movement, was elected president of Nagorno-Karabakh in 1994. In 1997, then Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan appointed Kocharyan

¹⁶⁹ Anar Valiyev, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Twenty Years Under Damocles' Sword," *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 2 (2012): 198–99.

¹⁷⁰ Özkan, "Who Gains from the 'No War No Peace' Situation? A Critical Analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 590–91.

¹⁷¹ Cameron Brown, "One Traveler's Observations from Azerbaijan," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6, no. 4 (2002): 69–70; "The Cult of Heydar Aliyev Marches On," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 25, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/heydar-aliyev-personality-cult/24968616.html>.

¹⁷² "Piling on a Personality Cult: The New Heydar Aliyev Film Trilogy," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 4, 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/personality-cult-new-heydar-aliyev-film-trilogy/24692753.html>.

¹⁷³ Natalia Antelava, "Dead Leader Still Influences Azeris," *BBC News*, November 1, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4372996.stm>; Michael Weiss, "How Azerbaijan is Like 'The Godfather,'" *The Atlantic*, July 11, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/07/how-azerbaijan-is-like-the-godfather/277717/>.

prime minister to bolster public support. Kocharyan rose in power and popularity and condemned Ter-Petrosyan for betraying the nation by entertaining concessions during mediation over Karabakh. Kocharyan was elected president of Armenia when Ter-Petrosyan was pressured to resign in February 1998 and was reelected in 2003 to serve out his second term until 2008. Serzh Sargsyan, the chairman of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Self-Defense Forces committee during the war, was promoted to Armenian Minister of Defense in 1993, rose to Minister of National Security in 1999, was appointed Prime Minister in 2007, and was elected President of Armenia in April 2008 and re-elected in 2013. Additionally, Leonard Petrosyan, the second president of Nagorno-Karabakh was serving as Armenian Deputy Prime Minister when he was killed in the 1999 Armenian parliament shooting, and Slava Avanesyan, once secretary of Karabakh's Security Council, later served as advisor to Armenia's Prime Minister.¹⁷⁴

Political competition that has emerged among elites in both Armenia and Azerbaijan has given way to nationalist propaganda that rests on an underlying foundation of fear. Internal struggle is characteristic of most ethnic conflicts as moderate leaders are challenged in their legitimacy by more radical frontrunners, and radical leaders compete for wealth and power. As stakes change, so do the positions of politicians. The most effective way for a leader to arouse the attention of the masses during an interethnic conflict is to play the ethnic card and adopt an extreme nationalist position. In this way political competition has become interwoven with populist attitudes. Leaders of both countries continue to maintain their legitimacy in their ability to protect their state from certain annihilation at the hands of the other, and therefore rely in part on the continuation of conflict to support their campaign platforms. The political competition that has developed in both countries contributes to the conflict's intractability.¹⁷⁵

The extent to which leaders in both countries adhere to their domestic political positions on the conflict is evident in the lack of public involvement in the mediation

¹⁷⁴ Panossian, "The Irony of Nagorno-Karabakh," 155.

¹⁷⁵ Nina Caspersen, "Separatism and Democracy in the Caucasus," *Survival* 50, no. 4 (2008): 240–41; Özkan, "Who Gains from the 'No War No Peace' Situation?," 584.

process. Even though it is quite clear that any peaceful resolution to the conflict will require some degree of compromise, neither leader has made any attempt to prepare his people for this possibility. While it is quite likely that a diplomatic settlement will involve Armenia relinquishing at least part of the territory of the seven occupied districts of Azerbaijan outside of Karabakh, politicians have begun to refer to them as “liberated lands” and proclaim that land liberated at the cost of Armenian lives will never be returned to Azerbaijan.¹⁷⁶ Surveys and assessments of a cross section of both Armenian and Azerbaijani society concluded that at virtually every level in both countries the idea of any concession in negotiations was incomprehensible.¹⁷⁷ This demonstrates the stark difference between the public pledges of the political elite and their nations’ actual negotiating positions. When asked why the Armenian public had been isolated from public debate regarding mediation proceedings after what appeared to be significant progress in the Minsk Group sponsored 2001 Key West talks, Kocharyan responded, “I would not want to raise their expectations, without knowing for sure that the conflict will definitely be resolved.”¹⁷⁸

Staying in power is more important to each regime than reaching a peaceful resolution; therefore, maintaining a maximalist public position is a political imperative for the leaders of each country. State propaganda directed to this end imparts domestic intransigence, but also hinders the peace process on a broader scale. Karabakh Armenians have unfettered access to Azerbaijani media in which they are regularly portrayed as the enemy. It comes as no surprise in this context that few people living in Karabakh should feel compelled to reunite their territory with Azerbaijan. Nationalist rhetoric associated with political campaigns can also raise the aggressiveness on the frontlines and lead to increased border skirmishes. There is a great danger that these incidents can spiral out of control and lead to a larger renewed conflict based on misperception and miscalculation. Bellicose rhetoric by the leader of one nation reinforces the fears of the other that in turn

¹⁷⁶ Irina Ghaplanyan, “Empowering and Engaging Civil Society in Conflict Resolution: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh,” *International Negotiation* 15, no. 1 (2010): 91.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 93–94.

¹⁷⁸ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 7.

contributes to the legitimacy of the opposing nation's regime and the cycle continues. Peaceful resolution is not possible while these conditions persist, yet as the decades old status quo continues there are still other factors that contribute to the overall intractability of this conflict.¹⁷⁹

D. EFFECTS OF THE STATUS QUO

The structure that has grown out of the present status quo strengthens the reinforcing loop archetype that has developed between fear and political competition in the growth of authoritarianism. Rampant corruption fills the pockets of an untold number of elite political decision makers, the realistic threat of impending war reinforces the propaganda machine, and billions of dollars are spent on an arms race rather than social development or institution building. Each side is given support and political credibility by large international players that reinforce the justness of each side's position. Meanwhile, the longer the standoff continues the more committed each side becomes and the more feasible an indefinite status quo appears.

The Armenian economy is overwhelmingly affected by 85 percent of its borders being closed. Under economic isolation, many of the methods of survival that society learned under Soviet communism remain viable for subsistence. The region surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, particularly Agdam, was a black market hub in Soviet times. The culture of corruption in the South Caucasus is not new, but has become more overt and bold under local independence. The most blatant and notorious example is the exploits of Samvel Babayan. During the war, while serving as Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Minister, Babayan established networks of corruption that drove a shadow economy and fueled the war effort. His troops looted the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and sold their plunder to Azeris in Iran. After the war, his racket continued in the form of a monopoly over trade in cigarettes and gasoline. As veritable warlord, Babayan controlled not only the economy, but also nearly every other aspect of life in Nagorno-Karabakh from opening a

¹⁷⁹ James Brooke, "Conflict with Armenia could Reignite during Azeri Election," *The Sofia Globe*, June 14, 2013, <http://sofiaglobe.com/2013/06/14/conflict-with-armenia-could-reignite-during-azeri-election/>; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 280.

new business to getting a job as a schoolteacher. Even after being convicted and imprisoned for the attempted assassination of the president of Nagorno-Karabakh, Babayan was still upheld as a national hero.¹⁸⁰

Corruption is still rampant today with Armenia and Azerbaijan ranking 105 and 139 respectively out of 176 countries on the 2012 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.¹⁸¹ In Armenia corruption is still evident in politics as well known oligarchs occupy seats in parliament.¹⁸² While the majority of corruption in Azerbaijan revolves around extracting rents from the state owned oil and gas industry, it is probable that a large share of the growing defense spending finds its way to well positioned pockets of political elites.¹⁸³ Moreover, the Aliyev family owns Azerbaijan's largest telecommunications company, Azerfon, as well as numerous banks, gold mines and construction companies.¹⁸⁴ According to award-winning investigative journalist, Khadija Ismayilova, the Aliyev family alone holds half of the nation's wealth.¹⁸⁵ The extent to which maintaining the status quo is influenced by personal gain among the political elite is difficult to quantify, but the means, the motive, the historical precedent, and the current level of statewide corruption suggest that this is indeed a factor in political calculations surrounding conflict resolution.

Through the realist lens, amassing arms and fostering nationalist sentiments through propaganda is a critical element in preparing the nation for the possibility of renewed conflict. It is critical to any war effort to cultivate a new generation of

¹⁸⁰ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 242–43, 45; Özkan, "Who Gains from the 'No War No Peace' Situation?," 586–87; Nona Shahnazarian, "The Making of a De Facto State," PONARS Eurasia, June 2010, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm_103.pdf.

¹⁸¹ "Corruption Perceptions Index 2012," Transparency International, accessed August 18, 2013, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>.

¹⁸² Richard Giragosian, "Networks of Crime and Corruption in the South Caucasus," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* no. 9 (2009): 3.

¹⁸³ Ibid.; Özkan, "Who Gains from the 'No War No Peace' Situation?," 591.

¹⁸⁴ Khadija Ismayilova, "Azerbaijani President's Daughters Tied to Fast-Rising Telecoms Firm," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 27, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan_president_aliyev_daughters_tied_to_telecoms_firm/24248340.htm; Jennifer Rankin, "Fortunate Son," *European Voice*, April 4, 2013, <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/fortunate-son/76865.aspx>.

¹⁸⁵ Rankin, "Fortunate Son."

nationalist patriots that will willingly fight to defend their nation. In this regard, any attempt at fostering constructivist attitudes toward compromise in conflict resolution is not in the nation's existential interests, and participation in dialog of this nature borders on treason. Remaining postured for war is necessary, but that does not mean that either nation is willing to resume open warfare.

Azerbaijan's strategy toward Armenia is similar to the United States vis-à-vis the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Baku is attempting to crush the Armenian economy and social structure by forcing it to keep up in an arms race.¹⁸⁶ President Ilham Aliyev's comments indicate Azerbaijan's commitment to this approach when he stated that his country will "continue to increase its military strength until the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia is resolved."¹⁸⁷ Aliyev continues to build up his position of strategic deterrence by announcing that the country has purchased roughly 100 helicopters as well as jet fighter aircraft and rocket systems and increased the military budget from \$163 million in 2003 to its present level of \$3.7 billion.¹⁸⁸ That amount will undoubtedly continue to grow with the establishment of greater collaboration in the defense industry between Baku and Moscow after talks between Vladimir Putin and Aliyev in August 2013. In contrast, Armenia has not been public with its defense procurement indicating that is both unable and unwilling to keep up with the notion of an arms race. While there is no way for Armenia to keep up on its own, it has still shown signs of responding to the buildup. In 2008, Armenia received \$800 million in arms from Russia at a discounted rate and 2011 also saw purchases from Moldova.¹⁸⁹

Azerbaijan's strategy of deterrence does not necessarily equate to a willingness to begin another war. Azerbaijan is heavily dependent on western investment and revenue from European energy export via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that lies within

¹⁸⁶ Valiyev, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Twenty Years Under Damocles' Sword," 200.

¹⁸⁷ "Aliyev Highlights Baku's Boosted Military; Yerevan Concerned," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 26, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-military-buildup-armenia-aliyev/25028461.html>.

¹⁸⁸ "Aliyev Praises Azerbaijan Army, Warns Armenia Against Intrusion," *World Bulletin*, June 26, 2013, <http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=111923>.

¹⁸⁹ Valiyev, "Nagorno-Karabakh," 200.

artillery range of the Armenian Army. Even the crudest indirect attack by Armenia could cripple Azerbaijan's exports and cause western companies to withdraw from the region. Therefore, very ironically, the more the west invests in Azerbaijan the more secure the status quo becomes. The very aspect of the economy that has allowed Azerbaijan to establish a military advantage is also its most critical vulnerability. Yet, the bellicose rhetoric must be maintained for the sake of political legitimization. Azerbaijan will continue to placate the international community with gestures toward a peaceful settlement while simultaneously attempting to maintain a military deterrent against Armenia and making promises to the Azerbaijani people that it will take back its land under Armenian occupation. That is not to say a war is not possible, but it stands to reason that it would not be a calculated decision on the part of the Azerbaijani elite. There is still a risky balance that could be shifted by a strategic misperception by either side.¹⁹⁰

Continuing to run the propagandist war machine is critical to both nations if the conflict were to again turn to war, but creates problems if peaceful resolution is in their future. The obstacles created by constant bellicose rhetoric may themselves be sufficient to prevent diplomatic reconciliation. Moreover, money spent on an arms race is not money spent on societal reforms or institution building. For a number of reasons that may include corruption and poor government policy in addition to funding the substantial defense budget, Azerbaijan only spent 0.03 percent of their 2010 annual budget on civil society development programs, which amounts to merely \$3.8 million.¹⁹¹ In contrast, Hungary, with a budget four and one-half times larger, spends 1.01 percent on such programs, which amounts to \$700 million annually.¹⁹²

Leaders of each nation have convinced their people that maintaining the status quo is an opportunity, but to realize the prospect of eventual victory both countries depend on international support. Faced with the large economy and defense expenditure of their neighbors, Armenia sees freezing the conflict as an opportunity to wait out

¹⁹⁰ Özkan, "Who Gains from the 'No War No Peace' Situation?," 591.

¹⁹¹ Gurbanov, "Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh."

¹⁹² Ibid.

Azerbaijan's oil boom. Azerbaijan is equally patient with its attempt to bring Armenia's economy to its knees through blockades and an arms race. While mediation has done little to resolve the conflict at the international level, the great powers that attempt to foster resolution on the international stage are enablers of the status quo at the national level. Armenia is heavily dependent on its diaspora populations throughout the West and in Russia to support its economy and it relies on Iran and Russia for trade and energy. Political support from Armenians abroad also lends credibility to Armenia's claim to national self-determination. The international strategic bargaining that takes place with larger powers keeps Armenian elites in office who continue to support their entrenched positions.

As Azerbaijani nationalism grows stronger, its need for international legitimization in mediation becomes increasingly critical to avoid another war. It has resorted to some of the same strategies as Armenia in its national discourse. The February 1992 massacres in Khojaly have been portrayed as genocide so as not to be outdone by the genocide claimed by Armenia. Azerbaijan relies on international support in its claim of territorial integrity so has presented itself as an ally to the west in the war on terror. Aliyev is forced to perform a continuous balancing act in appeasing the domestic demands for reuniting the homeland while not upsetting the status quo by which he maintains political control and economic stability.¹⁹³

Mediation keeps people on both sides content that something is being done and provides an outlet other than violence. If mediation were to suddenly end, it is likely that strategic focus would shift exclusively to preparation for war, and getting all parties back to the discussion table would be made ever more difficult. If 19 years of the status quo has proven anything, it is that nearly two decades of the current situation has been survivable. To the young men and women of both nations entering their early adult lives, conscripting in the military and attempting to have a voice in the nascent civil societies of Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijan, this is the only world they know. It is no exaggeration to state that the longer this conflict continues, the more difficult it will be to

¹⁹³ Özkan, "Who Gains from the 'No War No Peace' Situation?," 591–92.

resolve and the more opportunity there will be for war to resume. Liberal reforms in the realm of economic integration and informal diplomacy, discussed in the next sections, appear promising for long-term peace and regional stability, but they face significant challenges under the current structure.

E. THE PROSPECT OF PEACE THROUGH ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Liberal theory of economic interdependence suggests that trade reduces conflict.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, integrating the Armenian and Azerbaijani economies may result in building mutual economic interests that could prevent further war and facilitate cooperation in other areas.¹⁹⁵ The maintenance of this conflict has imparted significant opportunity cost to all parties; so finding ways to curtail future loss would be a step toward reconciliation. Armenia has lost out on lucrative investments in pipeline projects that could have brought in millions of dollars of oil and gas transit fees.¹⁹⁶ Azerbaijan, in the meantime, had to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to build transportation infrastructure that bypasses Armenia.¹⁹⁷ Nagorno-Karabakh constituted approximately one third of Azerbaijan's arable land prior to the conflict, and dammed or diverted rivers in Karabakh have led to water shortages in Azerbaijan.¹⁹⁸ Additionally, the blockade on the Nakchivan Autonomous Republic has disrupted agricultural production and transportation to Azerbaijan, now possible only through Turkey and Iran.¹⁹⁹ Estimates by the World Bank in 2001 indicated that lifting the economic blockade would lead to a

¹⁹⁴ Bruce Russett and John R. Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001); Håvard Hegre, John R. Oneal, and Bruce Russett, "Trade Does Promote Peace: New Simultaneous Estimates of the Reciprocal Effects of Trade and Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 6 (2010).

¹⁹⁵ Challenging this theory, Keshk, Pollins, and Reuveny argue that while conflict inhibits trade the reverse relationship is not statistically apparent. Omar M.G. Keshk, Rafel Reuveny, and Brian M. Pollins, "Trade Still Follows the Flag: The Primacy of Politics in a Simultaneous Model of Interdependence and Armed Conflict," *Journal of Politics* 66 (2004): 1155–79.

¹⁹⁶ Valiyev, "Nagorno-Karabakh," 200.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Marius-Eugen Opran, *Report on Mission to Azerbaijan: The Role of Civil Society in Modern Azerbaijan*. (Black Sea-Caspian Sea International Fund, 2011), 5.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

doubling of Armenia's exports and raise its GDP by 30 percent.²⁰⁰ Azerbaijan's exports would also be expected to increase by \$100 million and raise its GDP by five percent.²⁰¹

The crux of the problem with integration lies in the realist understanding of relative economic gains and Azerbaijan's aforementioned economic strategy toward Armenia. Indicated in the figures above, both countries would gain in absolute economic terms, but Armenia has substantially more to gain than Azerbaijan. From Armenia's current economic state, virtually any cooperation would benefit Armenia more than Azerbaijan in relative terms. An exhaustive 2012 research paper produced by The European Geopolitical Forum investigates the question of whether economic incentives could help break the stalemate in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, concluding that such inducements are only capable of playing a secondary role.²⁰²

Benefits that would arise from economic cooperation could bring an end to the economic isolation of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, provide more direct routes for Azerbaijani energy, reduce the siege mentality of Karabakh, generate economic interdependencies, provide humanitarian relief to the seven occupied districts surrounding Karabakh, and change the zero-sum game into a mutually beneficial scenario. Experts that are critical of economic incentives point out that economic benefits could not outweigh the security losses inherent in cooperation. Anyone participating in such a program would fall outside of the accepted social norms surrounding the conflict and be labeled a traitor. Many believe that Armenia has missed their opportunity since most of the lucrative projects have already been completed. Furthermore, it would upset the economic and political balance with Moscow if Russian gas sales to Armenia were displaced by less expensive energy from Azerbaijan.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Evgeny Polyakov, *Changing Trade Patterns After Conflict Resolution in South Caucasus* (The World Bank Europe and Central Asia Region Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Sector Unit, 2001), 37.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Marat Terterov and George Niculescu, *A Pragmatic Review of Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Resolution: Could Economic Incentives Help Break the Current Stalemate?* (Brussels: The European Geopolitical Forum, 2012), 4.

²⁰³ Ibid., 16–18.

Based on surveys, Armenians and Azerbaijanis each had different interpretations of why economic cooperation would not provide an incentive toward ending the status quo, but both sides agreed that economic incentives alone would not be sufficient to bring about change. Armenia would be unlikely to approve of any incentive that would detract from its overall security, and therefore economic cooperation could only take place once the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh was determined.²⁰⁴ Azerbaijan, controlling the levers of any potential economic engagement, would be unlikely to initiate any cooperative arrangement based on concern that it would appear as weakness on the part of Baku in conceding to aggression.²⁰⁵

F. INFORMAL DIPLOMACY: ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

The constructivist role of informal diplomacy in resolving the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is important for long-term regional stability and a lasting peace between nations. Some scholars, such as Philip Gameghelyan, believe that a constructivist approach must be the first step toward successful initial settlement. Gameghelyan, co-director of the Image Center for Conflict Transformation, believes that efforts toward conflict resolution has been excessively focused on state interests at the international level and too little has been done to address the identity needs of both sides that are at the root of mutual mistrust between societies.²⁰⁶ He asserts, “the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is intractable not because its root causes cannot be resolved, but rather because they have hardly been understood or articulated, let alone addressed.”²⁰⁷ If it is implemented successfully, a focus on socialization has the ability to change the perceptions of society to see the other side as people rather than the enemy. It can provide understanding of the opposite side’s perspective on the conflict in a way that interests on both sides may eventually be met. Through a broader view of the conflict, both sides can see that attempting to solve the conflict in a zero-sum framework stands no

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 32.

²⁰⁶ Gamaghelyan, “Rethinking the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” 34.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

chance of peaceful resolution. Through intercultural dialogue, common ground can be established upon which there is agreement so that the process of reconciliation can begin. The fundamental goal of informal diplomacy is to establish trust between nations that interests of each side will be respected and that the terms of a settlement will be upheld.

In this section, informal diplomacy refers to both track two and track three diplomatic initiatives. The last two decades of international mediation of this dispute is an example of track one diplomacy, characterized by talks among high-level leaders that directly represent the interests of the state. Track two diplomacy refers to a problem solving approach undertaken through interaction between influential non-governmental leaders such as NGOs or leaders of religious or academic institutions. An initiative at the grassroots level to raise awareness and empower communities toward conflict resolution is referred to as track three diplomacy and may include meetings, media generating events, or other activities that provide a voice to a marginalized population. This brief discussion of civil society engagement will encompass both track two and track three as well as the growing role of online social networking that in many ways bridges the gap between these two tracks.²⁰⁸

Many promising initiatives are underway that promote dialogue between the two sides in a neutral forum of understanding. Among the most prominent are Global Voices Online, Model Caucasus Parliament, and the Image Center for Conflict Transformation. The latter publishes an online journal, *Caucasus Edition: Journal of Conflict Transformation*, as well as a blog, *Neutral Zone: Blog of Caucasus Edition*.²⁰⁹ The Image Center for Conflict Transformation also hosts offline events including an annual conference in Boston to bring people from both sides of the conflict together to openly discuss their differing perceptions of their history, the conflict, and the people of their countries. These programs have a variety of sponsors in the United States and Europe.

²⁰⁸ “Glossary of Terms for Conflict Management and Peacebuilding: Tracks of Diplomacy,” United States Institute of Peace, accessed August 20, 2013, <http://glossary.usip.org/resource/tracks-diplomacy>.

²⁰⁹ “Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation,” Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation, accessed August 20, 2013, <http://www.imaginedialogue.com>; *Caucasus Edition: Journal of Conflict Transformation*, accessed August 20, 2013, <http://caucasusedition.net>; “Neutral Zone, Imagine Center for Conflict Resolution, accessed August 20, 2013, <http://imagineneutralzone.com/category/blog-posts/>.

Model Caucasus Parliament is sponsored by the Eurasia Partnership foundation that is funded by the United Nations, US Department of State, UK Department of International Development, UK Foreign Commonwealth Office, and several other non-profit and corporate sponsors.²¹⁰ The Imagine Center is supported by the US embassies in Baku and Yerevan, the US Conflict Prevention Pool, and the Norwegian Atlantic Committee.²¹¹ Global Voices began as a project of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School and now enjoys the support of 20 other non-governmental and corporate financiers.²¹²

While social media is a critical enabler for ongoing informal diplomacy, it is not been the panacea that some may have hoped for. Under the conditions of closed borders and political pressure created by this frozen conflict, online social networking is the logical forum in which to carry the ongoing diplomatic dialogue. With the Internet acting as the “great social equalizer,” conversations can exist online that would not otherwise occur, yet as much as it is a tool that facilitates understanding between the two sides it is also a forum for harsh propaganda and hatred.²¹³ There are thousands of people taking part in “mini information wars with members taking sides, swearing at each other and humiliating each other.”²¹⁴ One example of this online hatred occurred in November 2010 when the NGO Caucasus Center for Peace-Making Initiatives attempted to organize an Azerbaijani film festival in Yerevan. Facebook erupted in violent threats against the event organizers and spread to others who voiced support for the event.²¹⁵

While some peace advocates believe that an increase in online social networking will open the door to peace building at the grassroots level, others are more skeptical.

²¹⁰ “Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Eurasia Partnership Foundation,” last modified July 3, 2013, <http://www.epfound.org/home.html>.

²¹¹ “Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation: About Us,” Imagine Center for Conflict Resolution, accessed August 20, 2013, <http://dialogueimagine.wordpress.com/about/>.

²¹² “Global Voices: Sponsors,” Global Voices, last modified May 2, 2013, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/special-thanks/>; Arzu Geybullayeva, “Nagorno Karabakh 2.0: How New Media and Track Two Diplomacy Initiatives are Fostering Change,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2012): 180–83.

²¹³ Geybullayeva, “Nagorno Karabakh 2.0,” 183.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

There are simply too few users on both sides engaged in dialogue and it has not developed a large enough base from which it can spread. Furthermore, there are just as many social media users that support renewed conflict, and the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan are also involved. The political elites on both sides have established a network presence through real and ghost accounts that propagate their own opinions. The governments recognized the threat posed by social networking and have taken measures to monitor online activity. Azerbaijan has prosecuted online activists through a subterfuge of various other exaggerated charges, and new online defamation laws that went into place in June 2013 make it even easier for the government to incarcerate activists on criminal charges.²¹⁶

While NGO programs go to great lengths to create films and sponsor political dialog between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, they have had limited effectiveness over the last two decades. One youth activist that has participated in such dialog programs sums up her experiences:

The communication between two sides becomes possible only when they are willing to hear something that completely contradicts their point of view. The most important thing that I have learned is that understanding someone's point of view does not necessarily mean agreeing with him or her. I would call this the number one principle for creating a possibility of cross-border dialogue. While addressing the disadvantages, I would say it is very difficult to go against the mainstream stereotypes of the society and have connections in Azerbaijan. For instance, my colleagues and I are often labeled as traitors.²¹⁷

Overcoming accepted societal norms of fear and hatred have been a significant obstacle for informal diplomacy. Mainstream media is clearly tainted by nationalist propaganda, so it should come as no surprise that this would carry over into online social networks.²¹⁸ Clearly, online social media is different than traditional media outlets in that there are some groups that discuss peaceful resolution, yet their peaceful virtual

²¹⁶ "Azerbaijani President Signs Law Criminalizing Online Defamation," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 6, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-internet-defamation-law-criminal-aliyev/25008799.html>; Gurbanov, "Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh."

²¹⁷ Gurbanov, "Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh."

²¹⁸ Geybullayeva, "Nagorno Karabakh 2.0," 178.

presence has not made a profound difference in the opinion of the majority. A November 2011 Facebook poll asked users in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, “What is the most effective solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict?”²¹⁹ The results were astounding. More than 51 percent (Table 1) responded that war would be the most effective solution.²²⁰ Realizing that social media is more prevalent among the younger generations of both populations, there is a growing likelihood that the very idea of peaceful negotiation has grown stale in this group of future elites as so many show signs of distrust toward any talk of resolution other than war.²²¹

No.	Options	Responses	Per.
1	I do not care (apathetic)	71	5.17%
2	War (Azerbaijan wins)	631	45.99%
3	War (Armenia wins)	46	3.35%
4	Status quo (existing state of affairs)	14	1.02%
5	There are no effective solutions	48	3.50%
6	Peace (win/win situation for both sides based on compromise)	477	34.77%
7	Regional integration (establishment of political union in SC)	85	6.19%
TOTAL:		1372	100.00%

Table 1. Facebook poll: “What is the most effective solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?”²²²

In the last two decades, civil society has made no perceptible progress in moving the regimes of either country toward conflict resolution. The obstacles and limitations imposed on informal diplomacy are indicative of each nation’s struggle in adopting liberal democracy. The authoritarian nature of regimes on both sides of this conflict has prevented moderate positions from taking root.

²¹⁹ Gurbanov, “Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

G. THE ROLE OF DEMOCRACY

A strong and independent civil society that demands transparency, challenges the government, and holds it accountable is essential for lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. When liberal democracy falters and civil society is not allowed to develop, people cannot cultivate trust in their state's leadership. When people cannot trust their own government, developing trust in the government of the other side is made even more problematic. Additionally, the regime must learn to trust the people for democratization to grow, and this cannot happen without a series of small steps toward building democratic institutions. Without trust between people and between governments a peaceful solution based on compromise is impossible. Without a stable democratic peace the leaders of each country will not have the popular mandate required to agree to a settlement and will remain tied to the status quo in the interests of a few powerful elite. There cannot be trust that a peaceful resolution will be adhered to or that future corrupt elections will not lead to a resumption of violence. Until maintaining political power is no longer contingent upon maintaining a culture of fear this conflict will remain intractable.

Democracy has experienced a downward trend over the last decade in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, according to their Freedom House "Nations in Transit" reports.²²³ The Freedom House scale ranks countries from 1 to 7 (with 1 being the most democratic) based on eight separate criteria including the electoral process, civil society, governance, judicial independence, and corruption. Armenia's overall score has slid from 5.00 in 2004 to as low as 5.43 in 2011 and currently sits at 5.36.²²⁴ Freedom House labels Armenia a "Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regime."²²⁵ Armenia has experienced a drop in all categories except corruption, which has seen an improvement

²²³ "Nations in Transit: Armenia 2013," Freedom House, accessed 21 August 2013, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2013/armenia>; "Nations in Transit: Azerbaijan 2013," Freedom House, accessed 21 August 2013, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2013/azerbaijan>.

²²⁴ Nations in Transit: Armenia 2013.

²²⁵ Ibid.

from 5.75 to 5.25 over the last decade.²²⁶ Azerbaijan is a “Consolidated-Authoritarian Regime” according to Freedom House, steadily falling from 5.63 in 2004 to its current score of 6.64.²²⁷ Azerbaijan has seen no improvement in any category, and its worst score is 7.00 on its electoral process.²²⁸ Notable among the lowest scores in each state is Independent Media. Armenia moved up from 6.00 to 5.57 over the last year as it experienced a decline in the number of defamation suits, and media monitors determined that all parties leading up to the 2013 election had equal access to the media.²²⁹ Meanwhile, Azerbaijan maintained its score of 6.75 as attacks on the media became violent and regulations on mass media and the internet were tightened.²³⁰

Events in Azerbaijan in 2013 leading up to the presidential election in October have also demonstrated a democratic backslide. On 10 April 2013, Baku closed down the Free Thought University, a school established in 2009 to promote democratic values. Several western backers of the project included the embassies of the United States and Great Britain as well as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Since 28 April 2013, the government of Azerbaijan has selectively jammed satellite signals of particular programs including a program entitled *Different News* broadcast by *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty* (RFE/RL) to the country of Azerbaijan. The FM radio broadcast of Azeri language news from RFE/RL was banned since 2009. Since 2009, RFE/RL journalists have been targets of “defamation campaigns; abductions and death threats; arbitrary detentions; physical attacks; and attempts to intimidate family members.”²³¹ In a 2 July 2013 speech, President Aliyev tacitly encouraged police to use force against political opposition during the run-up to the next presidential election. He reminded the audience of high-ranking police officers that following post-election

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Nations in Transit: Azerbaijan 2013.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Nations in Transit: Armenia 2013.

²³⁰ Nations in Transit: Azerbaijan 2013.

²³¹ “RFE/RL Reports Interference with its Signal to Azerbaijan,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 30, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/release-interference-with-rferl-signal-to-azerbaijan/25023524.html>.

violence of 2005 no officers were punished and emphasized that no one from police forces will be disciplined for similar actions in upcoming protests.²³²

The discussion of democratization and conflict resolution between Azerbaijan and Armenia can in one way be simplified to a philosophical debate over what comes first, the chicken or the egg. Will democracy open the door to moderate positions that will eventually lead to cooperation, or is democratic reform sufficiently stifled by the conflict that waiting for each nation to change its internal politics is futile? Is continuing a transition to liberal democracy a dangerous proposition amid an ongoing ethnic conflict? Furthermore, how should mediators approach democratic reform and what role should it play on the international stage?

In a 1995 article entitled “Democratization and the Danger of War,” Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder contrast the virtues of democratic peace theory with the risk of war associated with democratic transition. The awareness adopted over the ages, that democracies do not fight wars against one another, is based on the notion that democracies have other ways of resolving their differences outside of interstate violence and is reinforced by a commonly held perception that democracies *should* not fight one another.²³³ Mansfield and Snyder are proponents of democratic peace theory, but offer caution for the cases of those states in transition from autocracy to democracy based on empirical data showing a significantly higher chance of war, specifically during the ten-year period following this transition. Among the factors cited by Mansfield and Snyder that contribute to war are a weak and unstable central government, increased political competition that results in ethnonational political extremism, a growing inflexibility among elites who have not adapted to democracy, and an overshadowing of domestic interests by militarism and a state’s international endeavors.²³⁴

²³² “Ilham Aliyev: ‘No One From Police Forces Will Be Punished,’” *Azeri Report*, July 9, 2013, http://azerireport.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4056&Itemid=42; “RFE/RL Reports Interference with its Signal to Azerbaijan”; “Azerbaijan Closes University Promoting Democracy,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 11, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-democracy-university/24954500.html>.

²³³ Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

²³⁴ Edward D Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratization and War,” *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 3 (1995): 79–97.

The conditions that outline the pitfalls of partial democratization describe the present situations in both Azerbaijan and Armenia with alarming accuracy. The ongoing conflict has kept both nations in a tumultuous transitory state between full authoritarianism and democracy that has not been conducive to peace. As Nina Caspersen points out, “the Karabakh peace process has suffered from the worst of two worlds: intense competition, especially in Armenia, but without the restraint and widened participation that democratization can provide.”²³⁵ In summing up the hazards associated with the period of democratic transition, Mansfield and Snyder conclude: “go fully democratic, or don’t go at all.”²³⁶ There may be risks associated with democratization that must be managed, but ultimately a consolidated democracy is more stable than a consolidated autocracy. In the case of striking a compromise for a settlement in this conflict, making political space for the emergence of moderate voices may be the only way to break the status quo.

The international community has misunderstood the partial democracies of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Political competition in both countries profoundly influences the masses but its focus is on the elite. Political downfall of leaders in both countries has not come by way of the ballot box, but rather at the hands of elites and hardliners. Elites incensed with military defeat or seeking greater power staged coups in Azerbaijan during the war. In 1998, members of Ter-Petrosyan’s own party orchestrated his ouster without public discussion. Still, the common perception in the international community, echoed by the Minsk Group, is that “the two presidents are ahead of their people” in attempting to find compromise that is not yet accepted domestically.²³⁷

Mediators’ misunderstanding of domestic politics in Armenia and Azerbaijan has contributed to the problem of democratization. Statements echo through the media that particular years are ripe for mediation because there are no elections, while others stand no chance. Believing this, Minsk group mediators attempt to isolate the presidents from

²³⁵ Nina Caspersen, “Regimes and Peace Processes: Democratic (non)Development in Armenia and Azerbaijan and its Impact on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45, no. 1–2 (2012): 132.

²³⁶ Mansfield and Snyder, “Democratization and War,” 95.

²³⁷ Caspersen, “Regimes and Peace Processes,” 137, 36–37.

domestic political pressure. Aliyev was able to convince Western embassies to put pressure on opposition groups following the fraudulent 2000 election, claiming that stability was required to go forward with mediation.²³⁸ Similarly in 2008, rather than condemning an undemocratic election, international mediators strengthened Sargsyan's position following the controversial election in order to gain his favor in an expected compromise.²³⁹ The path of intractability has been paved by the good intentions on the part of mediators aimed at bolstering strong leadership rather than fostering institutional development. The Minsk Group's constant search for a quick fix rather than a long-term solution has left the conflict unresolved and neither country better off.

H. CONCLUSION

The ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has created a setting in which political competition, focused on ethnic nationalism, has been woven into the fabric of the sociopsychological infrastructure of both nations. Political and economic elites have manipulated the conditions of status quo to their benefit and created a system that reinforces itself through fear and corruption. In this structure, the only people who have the power and influence to bring about a compromised diplomatic solution are those who benefit from maintaining the status quo. Economic integration remains impossible, and informal diplomatic initiatives have gained little traction. Meanwhile, international involvement by larger powers has reinforced the intractable structure at the national level by providing resources and legitimacy that leaders of both countries rely on to maintain their entrenched positions.

International mediation has been ineffective because it cannot create conditions or provide incentives to the leaders of either nation that would make a settlement more attractive than the current status quo. While a diplomatic settlement would bring long-term stability and economic growth to both nations, neither leader is willing to jeopardize short-term security or their personal power and wealth. Rather than focusing on immediate solutions that trying to fit a square peg into a round hole, international

²³⁸ Ibid., 137.

²³⁹ Ibid.

mediators need to adopt a long-term outlook that rounds sharp edges and reshapes the problem. A purely constructivist approach will never be sufficient to subdue the national or individual interests on either side, and an approach based purely on these interests will only result in continued intractability. Due to the conditions on both sides of this conflict, compromise will only be possible through democratization. International support for democratization is required and must be integrated into the mediation process. A course toward final resolution can only be charted once short-term incentives are tied to progress along a path toward democratization that will eventually lead to long-term stability.

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V. CONFLICT AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a contemporary dispute spawned from different nationalistic understandings of history that were constructed in the twentieth century. According to Thomas de Waal, the conflict “makes sense only if we acknowledge that hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis were driven to act by passionately held ideas about history, identity, and rights.”²⁴⁰ Nevertheless, this dispute does not exist in a vacuum. These countries have borders, and among the states that border this dispute each nation has unique interests and its own designs to influence the geographically strategic South Caucasus. The territorial dispute, amid a paucity of resources and relative lack of independence, led Armenia and Azerbaijan to seek alliances with larger more influential states with which they could pursue their geopolitical aspirations. The hostile context in which these alliances were formed ensured that patron states would be rivals as well.²⁴¹ The role of national alliances in the conflict, particularly the greater regional powers of Turkey and Russia, have been seamlessly woven into the narratives that describe the history of this conflict in a way that portrays an air of anti-colonialism.²⁴² While external state actors did not create this dispute, their various contributions and conflicting interests have created and maintained a polarized status quo at the international level that remains an insurmountable barrier to effective conflict resolution.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the framework for mediation in this conflict by explaining past efforts at mediation and describing different approaches toward resolution. The four sections that follow explore the positions of the United States, Turkey, Iran, and Russia, how their influence contributes to the regional balance of power, and their role in conflict resolution. A summary of cumulative barriers to

²⁴⁰ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 272.

²⁴¹ Andrey Yepifantsev, “Russia in Transcaucasia: What’s Gone Wrong?,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, September 24, 2011, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Russia-in-Transcaucasia-Whats-Gone-Wrong-15334>.

²⁴² de Waal, *Black Garden*, 273.

effective mediation is provided which leads into a conclusion discussing an approach to future mediation.

A. MEDIATION: DOES THE APPROACH MATTER?

The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) established the Minsk Group in 1992 to encourage conflict resolution over the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute following unsuccessful independent negotiation attempts by Russia, Kazakhstan, and Iran in 1991 and 1992.²⁴³ While it has not entirely supplanted bilateral diplomacy, particularly by Russia, the Minsk Group has been the single internationally recognized organization dealing with Nagorno-Karabakh mediation.²⁴⁴ The predominantly passive mediation by the OSCE has been ongoing for the last two decades without success. Due to the confidential nature of the talks, it is difficult through the media to get an appreciation of any minor intangible gains; however, after this amount of time it is safe to say that 20 more years of the same would not result in anything substantially different. Mediation has failed for the simple, obvious, reason that virtually every possible combination of policy or concession that was thought up over the last 20 years has been less desirable than maintaining the status quo.²⁴⁵

Thomas Ambrosio, while examining reconciliation efforts from the U.S. policy perspective, summarizes the problem of Minsk group mediations as its passive approach toward mediation.²⁴⁶ Ambrosio argues that a more active approach, even as a unilateral effort by the United States, would yield better results than what the OSCE has produced to date.²⁴⁷ Ambrosio criticizes the Minsk Group's "passive diligence," making proposals, encouraging debate, looking for common ground, and facilitating mutual understanding, as insufficient.²⁴⁸ This approach might have been effective if it was

²⁴³ The CSCE became the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in January 1995.

²⁴⁴ Russia was designated as co-chair of the Minsk Group, alongside Sweden, in December 1994; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 255.

²⁴⁵ Ambrosio, "Unfreezing the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 99.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 99–100.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 95–97.

pursued when the conflict was ripe for negotiation under an effective mutually hurting stalemate leading up to or immediately following the May 1994 cease-fire.²⁴⁹ However, in the months after the cease-fire, a new status quo rapidly normalized while the Minsk Group member nations, lacking solidarity, were unable to act. By the time the Minsk Group partially reconciled its differences with Moscow, and incorporated Russia as a co-chair, the momentum required for passive mediation was lost.²⁵⁰ After 20 years of unsuccessful mediation with passionately entrenched nationalistic factions, Ambrosio makes a credible argument for moving toward diplomacy that is more active. He points out that while a substantially active commitment to resolution can be diplomatically and geopolitically costly, such an approach has proven successful in both the Dayton Accords and Northern Ireland's Good Friday Accord.²⁵¹ The April 2001 Key West talks arranged by the Bush administration was the most active of all Nagorno-Karabakh mediation to date and came the closest to reaching an overall settlement with both sides agreeing on a reported 80 to 90 percent of the issues.²⁵²

While the argument for an active approach is compelling, a multi-faceted dilemma surfaces when regional states surrounding the conflict must weigh potential economic and geopolitical costs of implementing or cooperating with active diplomacy against their national interests in maintaining the status quo. States contemplating active mediation must consider not only their ability to influence both Armenia and Azerbaijan but also the level of cooperation that they can garner from neighboring countries to prevent a shift in power to their disadvantage. The current bipolar balance of power in the region, precisely aligned with the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has not only prevented effective active diplomacy but also in many ways emboldens both sides to

²⁴⁹ Moorad Mooradian and Daniel Druckman, "Hurting Stalemate or Mediation? The Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, 1990-95," *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 6 (1999): 710.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 253.

²⁵¹ Ambrosio, "Unfreezing the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 95.

²⁵² Ibid., 99; de Waal, *Black Garden*, 267.

maintain their inflexible positions on the Karabakh issue.²⁵³ While active diplomacy may one day prove itself as the key to resolving this dispute, it is unlikely that any diplomatic approach will be effective while the current balance of power remains the status quo. The following pages examine the positions of the United States, Turkey, Iran, and Russia in this dispute, how their influence contributes to the regional balance of power, and their role in conflict resolution.

B. UNITED STATES

The United States' policy toward the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, while self-conflicting and inconsistent, has generally favored Azerbaijan's claim of territorial integrity. While alliances with the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) and Israel align U.S. interests with those of Azerbaijan, the United States has attempted to maintain diplomatic ties with Armenia throughout the frozen conflict.

The United States' interest in Armenia is strongly influenced by domestic politics, particularly by Armenian-Americans who wish to see Armenia prosper as a democracy.²⁵⁴ The Armenian lobby was influential in pushing Section 907 of the 1992 FREEDOM Support Act through Congress. Section 907 excludes Azerbaijan from all governmental assistance aside from non-proliferation and disarmament until, as it states, "the President determines, and so reports to Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive use of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh."²⁵⁵ Pressure from the Obama administration for Armenia and Turkey to sign the Zurich Protocols in October 2009, which would have opened borders and normalized Turkey-Armenian relations without regard to resolution

²⁵³ According to Moorad Mooradian and Daniel Druckman, of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, effective mediation is contingent upon developing a sense of urgency with incentives that are in some way comparable or equally important as the cost of casualties lost in combat. They also attest that this is a difficult proposition and that identifying opportunities or creating a sense of urgency is further complicated when both sides believe in their own military superiority. Mooradian and Druckman, "Hurting Stalemate or Mediation?," 725.

²⁵⁴ Jim Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for US Interests* (Congressional Research Service, 2011), i.

²⁵⁵ 102nd Congress of the United States, *Public Law 102-511—OCT. 24, 1992: Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets Support Act of 1992* (Washington, DC: Congress, 1992), Section 907.

of Nagorno-Karabakh, was another reflection of U.S. policy presumably designed to appease the Armenian Diaspora. This active U.S. diplomacy, attempting to unlink Turkish-Armenian relations from the Karabakh conflict, would have given Armenia political space with which to mediate without the pressure of economic blockade. Consequently, it also demonstrated the President's desire to move the Armenian genocide issue off the foreign policy stage to be dealt with separately by historical commission, as called for in the protocol. From a domestic perspective, this policy backfired when disapproval among the Armenian diaspora over concession on the Armenian genocide outweighed their concern for the economic benefit to Armenia, revealing the diaspora's diverging interests from those of Yerevan.²⁵⁶

Compared to relations with Armenia, the United States is more engaged with its interests in Azerbaijan. These interests initially revolved around oil and gas development and export but have grown to address security and logistics challenges in support of military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Global War on Terror at large. Azerbaijan has also been an instrumental partner to the United States in efforts to contain Russian and Iranian influence in the region.

Azerbaijan oil and gas production has been a driving factor in U.S. relations. As early as 1994, signs of American preferentialism in Azerbaijan began to appear. Pressure from the U.S. government, refusing to allow U.S. ownership in the same oil consortium as Iran, convinced Azerbaijan to take back Iran's five percent share in the Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC) and sell it to Exxon.²⁵⁷ The United States has continued to support private investment in Azerbaijan oil and gas exports in order to diversify energy sources in the region and reduce Russia's influence on the European energy market.²⁵⁸ In September 1997, Azerbaijan further embraced western involvement by signing a deal for construction of the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline to be completed in

²⁵⁶ Vladimir Socor, "Azerbaijan Clarifies View of Baku-Ankara-Yerevan Normalization Process," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 53 (2011), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37658&cHash=0ca27e52f8a8779c988fd09aa2db2776.

²⁵⁷ Güner Özkan, "Economic and Security Values of Caspian Energy for Azerbaijan," *USAK Yearbook of International Politics and Law* 1 (2008): 322.

²⁵⁸ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, i.

2004.²⁵⁹ Only three months later Azerbaijan helped the U.S. realize the purpose of their involvement in the AIOC consortium when Azerbaijan oil began flowing to the Georgia port of Supsa.²⁶⁰ U.S. engagement during the Clinton administration was aimed at ensuring Azerbaijani oil would make it to market without relying on transit through Russia, where it would add to the vast energy control Russia already had over Europe.²⁶¹ The route through Turkey was also advantageous to U.S. interest in rewarding Turkey for prolonged support during the Cold War.²⁶² By circumventing Russia's involvement in oil export, Baku and Ankara affirmed their ties to the west and further cemented the divide with Yerevan, Moscow, and Teheran.²⁶³

Azerbaijani oil partnerships with U.S. involvement grew substantially in the years that followed. Through a partnership formed in 2002, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Company, an 11-member consortium led by BP along with U.S. firms Conoco-Phillips, Amerada Hess, and Chevron, agreed on terms of ownership and operation of the BTC pipeline for oil exports to Europe.²⁶⁴ In 2007, the United States granted Azerbaijan \$1.7 million to conduct a feasibility study on the prospect of a pipeline across the Caspian Sea in order to bring central Asian gas to the BTC pipeline and provide additional gas to Europe.²⁶⁵ As one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and an alternative energy exporter for Europe, Azerbaijan will remain an American economic partner for the foreseeable future.²⁶⁶

Circumstances surrounding the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 changed the course of history for U.S. involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh mediation. Amid more pressing international concerns, Washington did not follow-up on the progress made in

²⁵⁹ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 252.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Martha Brill Olcott, "US Policy in the South Caucasus," *The Quarterly Journal* no. 3 (2002): 60.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 252.

²⁶⁴ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 37.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Azerbaijan's GDP has grown from \$1.2 billion in 1992 to over \$54 billion in 2012. Richard Weitz, "Strategic Posture Review: Azerbaijan," *World Politics Review*, September 19, 2012, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12349/strategic-posture-review-azerbaijan>.

April 2001 in Key West. Instead, drawing even closer to Baku as an ally in the Global War on Terror, the United States included in the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2002 a statement that gave the president authority to waive Section 907 provisions, which the president has done every year since 2002.²⁶⁷ The leading reason for this waiver has been to secure access to the Northern Distribution Network through which Azerbaijan allows over-flight, landing, and refueling of aircraft bound for Afghanistan as well as land transportation of military supplies in order to bypass Pakistan.²⁶⁸

While the Obama administration has stated that resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a priority, larger global issues have continued to eclipse U.S. interest in the frozen conflict. Higher priority has been given to a global war on terror, war and subsequent nation-building efforts in both Iraq and Afghanistan, concerns over Iran's nuclear program, and a strategy to pivot to the Asian Pacific to deal with potential threats posed by North Korea and China.²⁶⁹

At first glance, the United States appears more geopolitically suited for active diplomacy than its current participation as a Minsk Group co-chair would suggest. American interest is divided between domestic influence on one side and international economics and energy security on the other, making the United States the best candidate, among all interested parties, to be an honest broker. Additionally, political capital expended by the United States is unlikely to significantly change the regional balance of power. Unfortunately, as neither a weapons supplier nor substantial contributor to the wealth of either country, the United States has little leverage in actively resolving the conflict, particularly if, or when, it becomes kinetic.²⁷⁰ Considering America's financial crisis and extensive military commitments, it is not surprising that Congress is divided on

²⁶⁷ 107th Congress of the United States, *Public Law 107-115 - JAN. 10, 2002: Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2002* (Washington, DC: Congress, 2002); Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 5.

²⁶⁸ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 5.

²⁶⁹ Ambrosio, "Unfreezing the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 107.

²⁷⁰ de Waal, Merry, and Markedonov, "Russia's Aims and Priorities in Nagorno-Karabakh."

the issue of involvement in the South Caucasus. While some representatives see the opportunity for prosperity in this strategic trade and security corridor, others are weary of U.S. involvement in the region's political and ethnic problems.²⁷¹

C. TURKEY

As a powerful geopolitical influence in the region, rival to Russia and Iran and ally to Azerbaijan, Turkey has proven its ability to hold resolution in abeyance. Turkey took advantage of the relative power vacuum immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union to gain a foothold in the South Caucasus by way of Azerbaijan. This alliance, ostensibly to reunite Turkic brethren, was an attempt by Turkey to redefine itself in the eyes of the west as a contender in global politics and a bridge to Central Asia.²⁷² Turkey was also determined to become a stakeholder in what would become a growing energy market.²⁷³ Azerbaijan saw Turkey not only as a historical and linguistic brother, but also as a model of a secular, free-market democracy with strong ties to the west.²⁷⁴ Russia considered Turkey an interloper into its sphere of influence that must be contained, while Iran regarded Turkey's expanding influence as an extension of U.S. policy in the region.²⁷⁵ Even though Turkey echoed Azerbaijan's sentiments of "One nation two states," its apprehension toward Russia and its fear of becoming embroiled in another situation similar to Cyprus limited Ankara's level of support for Azerbaijan.²⁷⁶ The geopolitical tension created by Turkey's eastward expansion laid the foundation for the nascent bipolar alliances that would share a common focal point in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.

Armenia's relationship with Turkey is encumbered by Ankara's staunchly pro-Azerbaijan position on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, Turkey's refusal to acknowledge

²⁷¹ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, i.

²⁷² Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 58.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 68.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 59–61.

²⁷⁶ Umut Uzer, "Nagorno-Karabakh in Regional and World Politics: A Case Study for Nationalism, Realism and Ethnic Conflict," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2012): 249.

the Armenian genocide of 1915-1916, and Armenia's infeasible claim to its historical territory in eastern Turkey. While Armenian attempts at rapprochement with Turkey began under the leadership of Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, in 1990, all attempts at normalization have been unsuccessful thus far. Relations broke down further in 1993 when Turkey closed its border to Armenia in support of Azerbaijan during the ongoing battle over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The closest that Turkey and Armenia have come to normalization in the last 20 years occurred in Zurich on 10 October 2009, when foreign ministers from both countries signed two protocols that together called for nothing short of completely open relations across borders. Together these protocols called for establishing embassies in both countries, opening their common border and agree to "implement a dialogue on the historical dimension ... including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations."²⁷⁷ As simple as this declaration appeared on the surface, there was a major hurdle that each country had to overcome. For Armenia, agreeing to these protocols would take discussion of genocide off the political table and move it to the annals of history. For Turkey, signing the protocols without a precondition for resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute would mean retracting the support it had extended to Azerbaijan by closing its borders originally. Turkey's rapprochement with Armenia is a zero-sum game as far as Azerbaijan is concerned. Progress made with Armenia is credibility lost with Azerbaijan.²⁷⁸ The Armenian government's public interpretation of the protocols refused to abandon Armenia's official policy on genocide recognition. While that did not stop them from agreeing to the text of the protocol, Armenia's interpretation no longer met the criteria of a concession for Turkey.²⁷⁹ Simultaneously, threats from Azerbaijan to cut off gas shipment to Turkey and increase political pressure from the Azerbaijani lobby in

²⁷⁷ "Full Text of the Protocols Signed by Turkey and Armenia," *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, September 4, 2009, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/88032/full-text-of-the-protocols-signed-by-turkey-and-armenia.html>.

²⁷⁸ Richard Giragosian, "Secession and Security in the South Caucasus: A Region at Risk," *St Antony's International Review* 6, no. 1 (2010): 155.

²⁷⁹ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 10.

Turkey led to post-protocol conditions on Nagorno-Karabakh by Turkey.²⁸⁰ The protocols have yet to be ratified by either country, and discussion has been suspended by the Armenian parliament indefinitely.²⁸¹

Considering that the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was the very reason that Turkey closed its border to Armenia, a breakthrough in Turkey-Armenia relations through the 2009 protocols would have been a huge step toward resolving the conflict. Mediators saw an end to Armenian isolation as a way to reduce Baku's advantage over Yerevan since "its closest ally had in effect made a separate peace with its enemy."²⁸² Armenian critics of Turkey's abstention argue that by placing new conditions on the protocols, Turkey removed any further pressure to open its borders while, at the same time, interjecting itself as an active negotiator while protecting Azerbaijan's interests.²⁸³ In August 2010, to repair relations associated with failed Turkey-Armenian protocols, Turkey and Azerbaijan agreed on a 10-year strategic partnership and mutual assistance agreement, specifying that any attack by a third country would be reciprocated by the other.²⁸⁴

Economic relations between countries in the region have played a role in regulating potential escalation of the conflict, and increased economic interaction may eventually inspire more productive mediation. In this regard, Turkey stands out for its firm solidarity with Azerbaijan that totally excludes any official interaction with Armenia. Pipelines have been constructed that bypass Armenia while tying even more closely the economies of Azerbaijan and Turkey, and the prospective Trans-Anatolian Pipeline to begin construction in 2015 will further reinforce this linkage.²⁸⁵ Limited trade between Turkey and Armenia does occur, to the order of approximately \$200

²⁸⁰ Weitz, "Strategic Posture Review: Azerbaijan."

²⁸¹ "Armenia Suspends Normalization of Ties with Turkey," *BBC News*, April 22, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8636800.stm>.

²⁸² Ambrosio, "Unfreezing the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 103.

²⁸³ Emil Danielyan, "Critics 'Vindicated' By Turkish-Armenian Fiasco," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 31, 2010, <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/2263636.html>.

²⁸⁴ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 10.

²⁸⁵ "Consortium Formed to Build Trans-Adriatic Pipeline," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 30, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/tap-gas-pipeline-consortium-azerbaijan/25061672.html>.

million annually and growing, but must be accomplished via Georgia, usually involving separate invoices to superficially disguise the country of origin.²⁸⁶ In contrast, both Iran and Russia, while firmly backing Armenia, have had open relations with Azerbaijan. Turkey's strong economic relationship with Russia and its aspirations of integration into the European Union have contributed to Ankara's restraint from greater direct involvement in the conflict.²⁸⁷

Turkey's foreign policy and role in the conflict have changed over the span of this dispute from Kemalist conservatism in the 1990s to being a much more involved and activist influence on the region today.²⁸⁸ If frozen conflict reignites to active conflict, Turkey is going to have a significant role to play. According to E. Wayne Merry, Senior Fellow for Europe and Eurasia at the American Foreign Policy Council, Turkey has a "patron-client relationship with Azerbaijan, in which ... it's all too apparent that the problem of the tail wagging the dog is a danger for Ankara's policy and interests."²⁸⁹ As Turkey becomes more reliant on Azeri gas there is potential for substantial change. On the one hand, Turkey might be more inclined to seek greater stability in the region.²⁹⁰ Conversely, it may become more disposed to support Azerbaijan, its primary source of energy.

D. IRAN

Iran's position in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute is based more on regional power and containment of western influence than unconditional support of either party to the conflict. The Islamic Republic of Iran maintains a relationship of convenience in support

²⁸⁶ Karen Arzumanyan and Aram Gareginyan, "Trade Between Turkey, Armenia Goes on Amid Legal Woes," *Today's Zaman*, December 25, 2011, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-266656-trade-between-turkey-armenia-goes-on-amid-legal-woes.html>.

²⁸⁷ Svante E Cornell, "Turkey and the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: a delicate balance," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1 (1998): 66.

²⁸⁸ de Waal, Merry, and Markedonov, "Russia's Aims and Priorities in Nagorno-Karabakh."

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

of Christian Armenia while not isolating Azerbaijan completely. With two of its four borders closed, Armenia receives critical resources from Iran in exchange for maintaining a roadblock to western hegemony.

Like Turkey, Iran sought to take advantage of the period of relative Russian isolationism in the early 1990s by establishing itself as a route for energy resources leaving the Caucasus, but it has had to tread lightly to avoid confrontation with Russia, upon which Iran depends for military hardware and technology. Iran's long-standing hostility toward the west manifests itself toward Turkey's policy in attempting to establish dominance in the region. Iran feared Turkey would act by proxy for western powers, bringing unwanted western influence into the region. By siding with Armenia, Iran could thwart Turkey's plans for eastern expansion and gain greater access with which to influence the Muslim Republics of Central Asia. While the majority of Azerbaijan is Shi'a Islam, making it an ideal target for Iranian influence, Soviet-era historical revisionism created Azeri nationalist sentiments of irredentism toward Iranian Azerbaijan. Iran fears that cross-border influence from Azerbaijan may sow the seeds of separatism among northern Iranians and create a threat to territorial integrity. As recently as March 2013 there were groups that met publically in Azerbaijan, calling for independence for Iran's Azeri minority. One participant was quoted in the media stating, "If the Iranian government loses control, the National Movement is ready to take control of Southern Azerbaijan."²⁹¹ Additionally, Azerbaijan's increasing secularism hinders closer ties with the Islamic Republic.²⁹²

Armenian's friendly relationship with Iran have brought opportunities for trade and diversity of energy resources while limiting Turkey's influence in the region and balancing against the Turkey-Azerbaijan alliance.²⁹³ As of 2011, Armenia received as much as 14.1 billion cubic feet of gas from Iran, and plans to expand this import may

²⁹¹ Golnaz Esfandiari, "Hard-Line Tehran Daily Says Azerbaijan Should Hold Referendum on Joining Iran," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 9, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/shariatmadari-hard-line-daily-referendum-azerbaijain-joining-iran/24948274.html>.

²⁹² Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 60–68.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 71.

lead to energy independence from Russian gas transported through Georgia.²⁹⁴ Current trade between Iran and Armenia is approximately \$500 million, but strengthening relations make Tehran hopeful that this amount will grow substantially, even doubling, in the near future.²⁹⁵ In a joint statement in December 2011, Iran and Armenia agreed to bring more vigor to their cooperation on technology and research to focus on joint energy projects that will stimulate increased trade.²⁹⁶ Construction began in late 2012 on an Iranian financed joint hydroelectric power plant along the Aras River near Meghri, Armenia, and talks are progressing well on plans to build a pipeline and railway connecting Armenia to Iran and other Persian Gulf countries.²⁹⁷

Unlike Turkey's relationship with Armenia, Iran has not allowed political tension to completely supersede its economic interests with Azerbaijan. A long shared border, potential trade routes via the Persian Gulf, and access to the Nakhichevan exclave by way of Iran make normalized relations desirable for Azerbaijan.²⁹⁸ A lack of mutual trust and the substantial western influence on Azerbaijan have prevented an enduring economic partnership from developing. Iran's hopes for transporting Azerbaijani oil to Persian Gulf ports were dashed with the establishment of the BTC pipeline that not only redirected oil to Europe but also bypassed Iran entirely.²⁹⁹ Limited cooperation between Azerbaijan and Iran continues on a year-by-year basis only out of necessity.³⁰⁰ Azerbaijan trades with Iran in gas in exchange for gas exports to the Nakhichevan

²⁹⁴ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 40.

²⁹⁵ "Iran Calls for Increase of Trade with Armenia to \$1 billion," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, February 2, 2013, [http://www.irna.ir/en/News/80524063/All_News/Iran_calls_for_increase_of_trade_with_Armenia_to_\\$1_billion](http://www.irna.ir/en/News/80524063/All_News/Iran_calls_for_increase_of_trade_with_Armenia_to_$1_billion).

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ "Armenia, Iran Build Joint Hydro Power Plant," *Global Times*, November 9, 2012, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/743403.shtml>; "Armenia, Iran in Talks to Build Oil Products Pipeline," *RIA Novosti*, November 8, 2012, <http://en.rian.ru/business/20121108/177303100.html>.

²⁹⁸ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 68.

²⁹⁹ Güner Özkan, "Azerbaijan-Iran Relations: 'One Nation Two States' or 'Enemy Brothers,'" *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, September 6, 2011, <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=2150>.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

exclave. Exports of Azerbaijani gas to Iran have grown from seven billion cubic feet in 2005 to 17.7 billion cubic feet in an agreement signed in 2009.³⁰¹

Israel, a U.S. ally and enemy of Iran, has established a strong partnership with Azerbaijan. Israel receives one-third of its oil from Azerbaijan through the BTC pipeline by way of ship from Turkey to Israel.³⁰² A continuing upward trend in Azeri exports to Israel peaked in 2008 at an estimated \$3.6 billion.³⁰³ Israelis are increasing their foreign investments in Azerbaijan as exemplified by joint ventures in a variety of areas, from mobile-telephone service to drone manufacturing, while an Azerbaijan oil company is currently exploring in Israeli waters south of Ashkelon.³⁰⁴ Even more profound than mutual commercial interests is Israel's contribution to Azerbaijan's defense. Early in 2012, Azerbaijan arranged its largest weapons purchase to date, agreeing to buy \$1.6 billion in weapons from Israel, an amount almost equal to its \$1.7 billion defense budget.³⁰⁵ Statements from Israeli defense officials assert that these weapons are not intended to threaten Iran, but rather Armenia.³⁰⁶ Nonetheless, these developments have potential to further align Armenian and Iranian interests, create a deeper divide in this conflict, and embolden Azerbaijan toward military action.

Iran's observation of Azerbaijan's military buildup has contributed to its growing perception of offensive collusion between Azerbaijan, Israel, and the United States. Increased U.S. presence in Azerbaijan as part of the Northern Distribution Network along with increasingly warm relations between Azerbaijan and Israel significantly raise anxiety for Iran amid the standoff against Israel and the United States over its nuclear program. In October 2012, 22 Azerbaijanis with links to Iran's Revolutionary Guard

³⁰¹ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 40.

³⁰² "Israel and Azerbaijan: Odd but Useful Allies," *The Economist*, January 21, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21543201/print>.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ It is interesting to note here that Azerbaijan's defense budget alone is equal to 68 percent of Armenia's entire 2012 budget. "CIA World Fact Book: Armenia;" Joshua Kucera, "Azerbaijan Makes Massive Israeli Weapons Purchase—But Not Because of Iran," *The Bug Pit*, February 27, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65053>.

³⁰⁶ Kucera, "Azerbaijan Makes Massive Israeli Weapons Purchase—But Not Because of Iran."

were convicted of planning terrorist attacks against the U.S. and Israeli embassies in Baku and given sentences between 10 and 15 years.³⁰⁷ Iranian security services alleged that Azerbaijan has assisted Israel in perpetrating cyber attacks and assassinations as well as planning for future military operations targeting Iran's nuclear research program.³⁰⁸ These fears have led to counter-espionage offensives focused on Iran's ethnic Azeri population.³⁰⁹ Tehran's greatest fear is that Israel could use Azerbaijan for staging or refueling in an attack on Iranian nuclear research facilities.³¹⁰ While officials of Israel and Azerbaijan deny such possibility, former Azeri military officers and Russian intelligence sources have admitted to the media that planning for such an attack has included the possible use of Azeri bases and intelligence services.³¹¹

Iran shares a common ambition with Russia to minimize western influence in the region, but Iran's desire to contain Russian power prevents effective cooperation toward resolving the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.³¹² Increasing regional stability would aid Iran in preserving territorial integrity and improving trade, but taking Azerbaijan's military focus away from Armenia may not be in Iran's best interest. Iran has offered itself as mediator to the conflict on multiple occasions, presumably to gain greater influence in the region and improve its international credibility. Karabakh-Armenians favor Iranian mediation because Iran has previously invited leadership of the disputed territory to the table, but Azerbaijani leadership strongly rejects Iran as an acceptable mediator.³¹³ According to Wayne Merry, a former American diplomat, and

³⁰⁷ "Azerbaijanis Jailed for Spying for Iran," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 9, 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-iran-spying/24733911.html>.

³⁰⁸ Michael Moran, "Will an Israeli Strike on Iran Come From Azerbaijan?," *GlobalPost*, November 1, 2012, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/121101/israeli-iran-azerbaijan-nuclear>.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Thomas Grove, "Azerbaijan Eyes Aiding Israel Against Iran," Reuters, September 30, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/30/us-iran-israel-azerbaijan-idUSBRE88T05L20120930>.

³¹² Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 10.

³¹³ Betts, "Third party mediation."

senior fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council, Iran's "poisonous relationship with Baku essentially rules it out as a positive contributor either to conflict avoidance or conflict resolution."³¹⁴

E. RUSSIA

Russia's approach to the states of the Former Soviet Union after its collapse, and its redefined role in the region, is explained in the 1993 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. In this document, Russia describes its role akin to a self-appointed protector of peace in its reclaimed sphere of influence. The doctrine states that Russia has a "responsibility to our peoples and to the world community for ensuring stability and human rights and freedoms in the space of the former USSR."³¹⁵ It also asserts that, "Russia will actively oppose any attempts to increase the military-political presence of third states in the countries contiguous with Russia."³¹⁶ This doctrine was written in sufficiently broad terms that Moscow could justify virtually any intervention in what it believed was its sphere of influence. Furthermore, it considered the growing influences of Turkey and Iran in the region as threats to Russian security. Given that its vulnerable southern border in the Caucasus also served as a strategic land bridge to Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Russia saw overlapping geostrategic reasons for maintaining an influential presence at the expense of any other nation. With ongoing instability in the Northern Caucasus and possible escalation of Islamic extremism, Moscow was determined to maintain influence and control in the states of the Southern Caucasus.³¹⁷

Russia's inward focus on domestic issues immediately following the fall of the Soviet Union created a void in the south Caucasus that was quickly filled by other influential nations, a consequence that Russia has subsequently attempted to reverse. Russia has developed a strong rapport with Armenia, siding with Yerevan in the dispute over Karabakh. While their relationship is mutualistic, it has created a substantial

³¹⁴ de Waal, Merry, and Markedonov, "Russia's Aims and Priorities in Nagorno-Karabakh."

³¹⁵ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Central Eurasia: Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, FBIS-USR-93-307 (1993): 4.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³¹⁷ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 63–65.

Armenian dependence on Russia both economically and militarily. Russia relies on Armenia as its only ally in the region, and aside from Iran, Armenia has no other large power with which to align. Russia has taken advantage of this arrangement largely through swapping Armenian property for debt owed to Russia, for which some estimates claim Russia now controls up to 70 percent of the Armenian economy.³¹⁸ Meanwhile, Moscow has forgiven the debts of many other countries that are less strategically important to Russia, indicating that this dependency is by Russian design. Among the Armenian assets now belonging to Russia, a large percentage of factories lay dormant as their Russian owners realize that in Armenia's economy these plants will not be as productive as their domestic counterparts are. The combination of Russian and Armenian policies exacerbates Armenian isolation. Not only are Armenian borders blocked by Turkey and Azerbaijan, but Russia's conflict with Georgia has complicated trade with Russia via Armenia's northern border.³¹⁹

Armenia depends on Russia for military and political support amid threats posed by Azerbaijan and Turkey. Moscow and Yerevan signed an agreement in August 2010 that extends Russia's military basing rights in Armenia to 2044 and pledges to safeguard Armenian national security, upgrading its presence there to one of virtual protectorate as it continues to supply modern weapons and support Armenian Army units.³²⁰ Russian troops in Armenia are estimated to number over 3,000, with predominantly Russian troops guarding the Turkey and Iran borders.³²¹

While Armenia is strongly linked to Russia both militarily and economically, Russia has not abandoned its relationship with Azerbaijan. Although Azerbaijan treats Russia with a high degree of skepticism, aggrieved by its treatment under Soviet Rule and suspicious of Moscow's objectives, it still cooperates with Russia when it is in its

³¹⁸ Yepifantsev, "Russia in Transcaucasia."

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Hannes Adomeit, *Russia and its Near Neighbourhood: Competition and Conflict with the EU*, Natolin Research Papers (Natolin Research Papers, College of Europe Natolin Campus, Warsaw, 2011), 61; Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 7.

³²¹ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 7.

own interest.³²² Russia has very limited political power over Azerbaijan. Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in favor of Azerbaijan is practically the only concession that would provide substantial leverage, but that would permanently upset the current balance of power.³²³ Instead, Russia has relied on minor dispensations such as material privileges, territorial concessions, and weapons sales to sustain their bilateral relations.³²⁴

Azerbaijan's view of Russia has changed since it initially received independence, becoming more pragmatic as politics changed in the region. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, and under the leadership of the Azerbaijan Popular Front, Azerbaijan saw their oil and gas resources as a potential political lever in which they could push Russian influence out of the region. Azerbaijan blamed Russia for the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, and by signing lucrative contracts with western companies they believed they could establish a pro-Azerbaijan lobby in the west to counter the influence of the large Armenian diaspora. Beginning in 1994 under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan adopted a more businesslike relationship with Russia, allowing Russian owned LUKoil a 10 percent share in its oil consortium. Perhaps unwittingly, this contract created internal conflicting interests in Russia between the Russian Ministry of Energy and the Military and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³²⁵

Azerbaijan's relations with Russia are not out of shared interests as much as necessity. Azerbaijan's domestic policy falls short of the expectations of the European Union and therefore it must rely on Russia's role as a mediator in the conflict.³²⁶ For this reason alone, it must tread carefully in dealing with Moscow. Despite Russia's alliance with Armenia, Azerbaijan believes that maintaining a cordial relationship with Russia will give it political and economic leverage.³²⁷ Russia's control of the Volga-Don Canal, for instance, is critically important to Azeri trade via the Caspian Sea to global trade

³²² Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 69.

³²³ Yepifantsev, "Russia in Transcaucasia."

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Özkan, "Economic and Security Values of Caspian Energy for Azerbaijan," 320–22.

³²⁶ Adomeit, *Russia and its Near Neighbourhood*, 67.

³²⁷ Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, 7.

routes.³²⁸ Moscow has taken advantage of its relationship with Azerbaijan to reap economic rewards on both sides of the Karabakh conflict, becoming an arms dealer to both countries. Between 2007 and 2011, it provided 55 percent of Azerbaijan's and 96 percent of Armenia's arms imports.³²⁹

From the beginning, Russia's interest in mediating has been motivated by its desire for regional domination, focused on national interests at the expense of peace. Moscow's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began under Mikhail Gorbachev in 1988, well before the conflict erupted into open warfare. Gorbachev's misunderstanding of the situation, and belief that the Karabakh-Armenian nationalist movement could be put down by force, gave rise to the last civil war of the Soviet Union in 1991. The fall of the Soviet Union led to full-scale war over Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia's entrance on the scene as mediator, and the formation of the CSCE Minks Group. Despite the fact that Russia was a member of the Minks Group, mediation from early 1992 through December 1994 saw Russia and the CSCE at odds over domination of the peace talks, effectively stalling any progress toward final resolution. This was in large part due to Russia's view that U.S. involvement in mediation was a pretense to encroach on Russia's sphere of influence as indicated in its foreign policy published the year prior:

In cooperation with the United States on international problems, the conflict situations along the perimeter of the Russian borders will, most likely, come to the forefront. We cannot exclude efforts by the United States, under the guise of mediation and peacemaking efforts, to take Russia's place in the countries of its traditional influence.³³⁰

Russia's goal of putting its own peacekeeping troops on the ground in both countries, as a bid for greater regional influence, was adopted by Armenia but vehemently rejected by Azerbaijan. Just four months after the cease-fire, on 20 September 1994, the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic signed an \$8 billion contract with companies from the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, Turkey,

³²⁸ Ibid., 23-24.

³²⁹ Paul Holtom et al., "Trends in international arms transfers, 2011, SIPRI Fact Sheet," *SIPRI Fact Sheet*, March 2012, http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=443.

³³⁰ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Central Eurasia: Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 9.

Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. Azerbaijan saw the so-called “Contract of the Century” as an opportunity to gain greater independence from Russia and therefore supported an alternate plan presented by the CSCE to implement multinational peacekeeping troops once a peace agreement was signed. Azerbaijan blamed Russia for an attempted coup to overthrow President Heydar Aliyev that followed the signing of the oil contract, furthering Baku’s resolve to support mediations by the Minks Group and abolishing Moscow’s chance at being the sole mediator. In exchange for concession on the future use of a multinational peacekeeping force, Russia became a co-chair on the Minsk Group in December 1994.³³¹

Russia’s early missteps and subsequent alliances have damage Moscow’s standing as a reliable mediator. The “ripeness” of the environment for negotiations was allowed to spoil as time passed after the initial cease-fire.³³² During talks in Moscow that followed the 1994 cease-fire, Azerbaijan’s apprehension vis-à-vis Russia’s intentions precluded an immediate settlement, and Russia’s disdain for a multinational peacekeeping force drained all momentum that could have been used to bring the conflict to a close.³³³ Furthermore, Russia’s close ties with Armenia have damaged its credibility as an honest broker. Consequently, Russian attempts at unilateral mediation, since the 1994 cease-fire, have not been as productive as was seen in Key West in 2001. In June 2010, at a summit hosted in St. Petersburg, President Medvedev presented proposals drawn up by Moscow without consultation with the other co-chairs of the Minsk Group.³³⁴ Azerbaijan dismissed this modified version of the Madrid principles without discussion, as they immediately perceived the proposal as favoring Armenian interests.³³⁵

³³¹ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 108-19.

³³² Mooradian and Druckman, “Hurting Stalemate or Mediation?,” 711.

³³³ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 253.

³³⁴ “Azerbaijan Confirms New Karabakh Peace Plan Presented,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 23, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Azerbaijan_Confirms_New_Karabakh_Peace_Plan_Presented/2108232.html.

³³⁵ Ibid. The Madrid principles are a step-by-step compromise between self-determination and territorial integrity established by the Minsk Group that would have refugees from both countries return to their homeland first, and hold a referendum to decide the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh at some point in the future.

After Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev cut his visit short, government officials in Armenia alleged that he ordered attacks on Armenian outposts in Karabakh out of frustration.³³⁶

The philosophy that drove Russian foreign policy, one of Soviet era military ambition backed by a Russian imperialist legacy, lasted decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, and only recently has it begun to change course.³³⁷ Even within the last decade, Russian military leaders, seeking to maintain power in the region, held firmly to maintaining the status quo.³³⁸ A discernible change in Russian attitude toward the conflict began just after the turn of the century as the Russian military moved out of the foreign policy arena, and the foreign ministry began taking on a larger role.³³⁹ The decade that followed showed significantly more engagement by Russia, with President Medvedev making more than 10 serious attempts at mediating.³⁴⁰ Russia's increased involvement led many critics of U.S. policy to argue that the United States had ceded to Moscow and "outsourced" its role as mediator to Russia.³⁴¹

While the Russian approach to the conflict may have changed, its interest in resolution was fleeting. Whereas Medvedev likely saw this undertaking as a chance for personal glory, Putin currently has no such interests.³⁴² Putin's flippant attitude toward conflict resolution, clearly displayed in a February 2007 press conference opining the benefits of restoring the Agdamski Portvein factory in Armenian controlled Azerbaijan, which produced Soviet era wine popular among alcoholics, indicates that this is not high on his list of priorities while in office.³⁴³ Consequently, Putin's pointedly arrogant and paternalistic attitude has brought him to personal conflict with the presidents of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ilham Aliyev fell out of favor with Putin in 2006 after refusing

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ de Waal, *Black Garden*, 276.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ de Waal, Merry, and Markedonov, "Russia's Aims and Priorities in Nagorno-Karabakh."

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ambrosio, "Unfreezing the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 107–08.

³⁴² de Waal, Merry, and Markedonov, "Russia's Aims and Priorities in Nagorno-Karabakh."

³⁴³ Ibid.

to restrict gas supplies to Georgia, and Serzh Sarkisyan's falling out occurred in 2009, in the wake of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, when he awarded Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili a medal of honor in Yerevan.³⁴⁴

Russia would benefit in the long-term from a stable peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but mediations as they have stood for the last two decades have been a zero-sum game. An internationally cohesive and rigid approach to settlement with United Nations backing may be able to compel cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but would certainly destroy Russian credibility in Armenia.³⁴⁵ Russia has clear interests in maintaining relations with both countries, but considering its relationship with Georgia, following the events of 2008, Russia cannot afford to lose Armenian loyalty while attempting to foster better relations with Azerbaijan.³⁴⁶ Russia's seemingly counterintuitive interest in American involvement in conflict negotiation has been to share the burden of taking sides.³⁴⁷ While Russia's status as a protector of Armenia has been enough to keep Azerbaijan from launching another military offensive, Moscow has adopted a policy that takes advantage of the conflict in favor of Russian interests.

By playing on the interests and fears of both sides, Russia has managed the conflict to its advantage in what Anar Vliyev refers to as "controlled chaos."³⁴⁸ Russia was able to maintain a military presence in Azerbaijan until 2013 and continues troop rotations to Armenia.³⁴⁹ It continues to sell arms to both sides and has been effective in preventing both states from integrating with NATO or the European Union.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Yepifantsev, "Russia in Transcaucasia."

³⁴⁶ de Waal, Merry, and Markedonov, "Russia's Aims and Priorities in Nagorno-Karabakh."

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Valiyev, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Twenty Years Under Damocles' Sword," 199.

³⁴⁹ Russia maintained a major radar station in Gabala, Azerbaijan that was established in 1985 and operated by Russian forces until early 2013. A lease in which Russia rented the site for \$7 million annually expired at the end of 2012. Russia was unable to negotiate a compromise with Azerbaijan's demand for \$300 million annually to continue the lease. David M. Herszenhorn, "Russia to Close Radar Station in Azerbaijan," *The New York Times*, December 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/12/world/europe/russia-to-shut-down-radar-station-in-azerbaijan.html>.

The level of Russian control over this conflict, and Armenia in particular, is illustrated by the events surrounding a 22 July 2013 meeting with the European Commission in Yerevan to negotiate the terms of a deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA) that would integrate Armenia into the EU market. Leading up to the conference, on 18 June, Russia announced that it would begin delivering \$1 billion in weapons to Azerbaijan including tanks, artillery, and rockets.³⁵⁰ Weeks later, on 7 July, Russian state-controlled Gazprom increased the price of gas exported to Armenia by more than 50 percent, forcing the Armenian government to subsidize consumer gas prices to avoid protest and prompting officials to consider transferring its remaining 20 percent stake in pipeline ownership to Gazprom to secure future concessions.³⁵¹ In the week preceding the economic summit, the Russian court made a spectacle of an Armenian Karabakh War veteran brought on trial for allegedly causing a serious traffic accident near Moscow. The man was heavily medicated when he was brought before the nationally televised court wearing a colorful flowery women's bathrobe.³⁵² On 24 July, Armenia reached an agreement on the terms of a trade agreement with the EU that was to be signed in November. The following week, news reports circulated that an Armenian soldier killed an innocent Turkish shepherd when he momentarily crossed the border to retrieve a lost sheep.³⁵³ The same day, the Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a formal statement condemning Armenia for the incident.³⁵⁴ A day later, it was released that it was a Russian unit that was providing security along the Armenia-Turkey border,

³⁵⁰ "Russia Starts Delivering \$1 Billion Arms Package to Azerbaijan," Reuters, June 18, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/18/us-russia-azerbaijan-arms-idUSBRE95H0KM20130618>.

³⁵¹ Marianna Ghahramanyan, "Armenia May Hand Gas Monopoly to Russia," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, July 10, 2013, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/armenia-may-hand-gas-monopoly-russians>.

³⁵² Samson Martirosyan, "Protesters Condemn Treatment of Armenian War Veteran in Russia," *The Armenian Weekly*, July 19, 2013, <http://www.armenianweekly.com/2013/07/19/protesters-condemn-treatment-of-armenian-war-veteran-in-russia/>.

³⁵³ "Turkish Shepherd Shot Dead by Armenian Soldiers at Border," *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 1, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-shepherd-shot-dead-by-armenian-soldiers-at-border-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=51809&NewsCatID=341>.

³⁵⁴ "No: 216, 1 August 2013, Press Release Regarding our Citizen who Lost His Life at the Turkish-Armenian Border," news release, August 1, 2013, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-216_-1-august-2013_-press-release-regarding-our-citizen-who-lost-his-life-at-the-turkish-armenian-border.en.mfa.

and it was a Russian soldier who killed the shepherd.³⁵⁵ If the timing of these events was not choreographed by Moscow, it is indeed surprising that they remind Yerevan of every element of leverage that the Kremlin maintains over Armenia at this critical juncture. Armenia's military balance vis-à-vis Azerbaijan and Turkey is sustained by Russia, Russia controls Armenia's economy and energy resources, and the substantial Armenian diaspora in Russia is firmly under Putin's thumb. Just six weeks after the groundbreaking agreement with the European Union, and under overwhelming pressure from Moscow, Yerevan announced that it would be joining the Russian-led Customs Union, a move that ended the possibility of EU integration.³⁵⁶

F. BARRIERS TO MEDIATION

Regional stability in the South Caucasus would bring greater prosperity to all countries in the long run, and each of the large powers discussed above has something unique to gain from a peace settlement. Nevertheless, neighboring states interests, woven into the conflict, have polarized the region and complicated resolution. While the mutually beneficial alliances that have developed out of the conflict have become inseparable from the dispute itself, the aligned interests of larger powers have significantly different objectives. To the United States, Turkey, Russia, and Iran, these two small states in the South Caucasus represent access to an energy source, strategic influence in the region, or both. To Armenia and Azerbaijan these partnerships provide the political support, economic resources, and military hardware that keep this conflict alive in the hearts and minds of the Armenian and Azeri populations, giving each country hope that one day they will be victorious.

In a 1999 study published in the *Journal of Peace Research*, Moorad Mooradian and Daniel Druckman from the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George

³⁵⁵ "Russian Border Guard Shot at Turkish Shepherd who Crossed into Armenian Border," *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 2, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russian-border-guard-shot-at-turkish-shepherd-who-crossed-into-armenian-border-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=51923&NewsCatID=355>.

³⁵⁶ "Armenia to Join Russian-Led Customs Union," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 3, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/armenia-customs-union/25094560.html>; "EU Officials Warn Yerevan Over 'U-Turn,'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 4, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/armenia-eu-customs-union/25095145.html>.

Mason University investigate the effectiveness of a Mutually Hurting Stalemate compared to pre-conflict mediation. Their research covers events in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from 1990 to 1995, ranking the effectiveness of resolution efforts against the level of conflict to determine their correlation. The study's focus on pre-conflict mediation has new relevance as the current cease-fire nears its twentieth anniversary with both sides still postured for war. As nearly a generation has passed, this dispute is assumably in a new pre-conflict stage. Mooradin and Druckman's conclusion, in ironic contradiction to the title of the journal, was that "timing for conflict settlement depends on raising the level of conflict until a stalemate is reached and then begins to hurt."³⁵⁷ They contend that there are regrettably few cases of international conflicts that have been settled before they escalated, and that finding common ground on which to mediate is just short of impossible when each side believes that victory is attainable.³⁵⁸ They pose a lofty challenge for mediators: to recognize circumstances, when they arise, in which each side may perceive more benefit in settling than going to war.³⁵⁹

G. CONCLUSION

While regional alliances and power politics have created a mediation-stifling status quo, the root of this conflict is ultimately a dispute over territory between two nations; only an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan will lead to the definitive conclusion to this era of conflict. For this reason, some critics argue that discussion of regional power politics takes the burden off the parties to the conflict, allowing them to blame others for stalled efforts toward peace.³⁶⁰ While this possibility exists, it is impossible to accurately frame this problem without taking into account the influence that larger powers have on peaceful resolution.

³⁵⁷ Mooradian and Druckman, "Hurting Stalemate or Mediation?," 726.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 725.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 726.

³⁶⁰ Anahit Shirinyan, "Assessing Russia's role in efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: From perception to reality," *Caucasus Edition: Journal of Conflict Transformation*, February 1, 2013, <http://caucasusedition.net/analysis/assessing-russias-role-in-efforts-to-resolve-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-from-perception-to-reality/>.

Recalling from the last chapter, the overarching strategy for Azerbaijan appears to be winning an arms race that would crush Armenia's economy and force it into submission. Armenia's goal is to outlast Azerbaijan's oil boon and let the occupation of Karabakh stand the test of time to become an internationally accepted norm. Each nation's pursuit of its goals relies directly on support from its international partners. Azerbaijan's strategy is fueled by international oil and gas trade as well as weapons purchased abroad. The main obstacle standing in the way of Azerbaijan taking its territory back is Armenia's alliance with Russia. Armenia's strategy depends on its ability to keep its economy afloat while maintaining its security, a challenge that is made difficult by its closed border with Turkey and continental Europe beyond. In this regard, Armenia is heavily reliant on Russia for most aspects of its survival. Polarized alliances have fueled the strategic goals of both sides of the conflict and created the military apparatus that both sides believe is suitable for victory. Military confidence, economic support, and political legitimacy afforded by international partners sustain the structure of the status quo at the national level that keeps ruling elites in power.

International mediation will only be effective when both Armenia and Azerbaijan believe that unilateral victory is unattainable or prohibitively costly and that a diplomatic settlement is more favorable than maintaining the present status quo. Countervailing interests between Russia and western powers in multiparty mediation has prevented the either mediator from developing the leverage required to create favorable conditions for a mediated settlement. As recent events illustrate, Russia has significant direct leverage over Armenia, but its leverage over Azerbaijan is limited. The United States and Europe have greater leverage over Azerbaijan but certainly not to the extent that Russia controls Armenia. Powerful active mediation would require extensive diplomatic cooperation and collaboration between Russia and western powers represented by the United States as well as the European Union, which has been completely unengaged in conflict resolution aside from contributions to the OSCE. The obvious obstacles to such cooperation are the very roots of the problem of conflicting interests that are outlined in this chapter. The alliances and partnerships that were established early in this conflict have woven this dispute into the fabric of a larger regional competition based on power and influence.

While the OSCE Minsk Group has failed to bring this conflict to a close, its efforts have not been in vain. The Minsk Group has maintained dialogue and kept the diplomatic structure alive that has provided a political outlet through which both countries can air their grievances on the international stage without escalating the conflict. A more active approach to mediation, as suggested by Ambrosio, could produce substantial gains when the time is right, but the current situation precludes this. Active engagement in this environment is likely to tarnish the credibility of the mediator only to further polarize regional alliances, as seen in both the Zurich Protocols of 2009 and the St. Petersburg Summit of 2010. Regional dynamics may eventually change due to circumstances anyone has yet to imagine. The U.S. State Department's leading role in facilitating the Zurich Protocols, although unsuccessful, was an attempt to accelerate such a change in the regional status quo. As unproductive as it appears in this case, diplomacy must not be put on hold. A structure for talks must remain in place and mediators need to be ready to act decisively when the conditions are right. Ongoing passive mediation by the Minsk Group can keep diplomatic channels open and diffuse interstate tension while maintaining a watchful eye on regional shifts of power.

Illuminating the national interests of regional powers reveals a collective action dilemma that may one day lead to the regions collective undoing. It is well within the power and purview of countries neighboring this conflict to construct foreign policy that would facilitate reconciliation, yet collectively these nations lack the political will to formulate peace at the expense of their own related interests. Most experts agree that the most catastrophic of possible outcomes, Russia and Turkey going to war over this conflict, is currently unimaginable. While this geographically strategic region has a history of bloody conquest, regional alliances appear to be temperate enough for the time being to withstand conflict without leading to a larger regional war. Nevertheless, this conflict is a *casus belli* in waiting that, if left unresolved long enough, could be the spark that ignites a war that could quickly spread the globe.

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VI. CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING INTRACTABILITY AND CHARTING A COURSE TO RESOLUTION

The seeds of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute were planted in an isolated area between two small nations at a time when conditions were ripe for ethnic turmoil, but the conflict that has grown now casts a shadow over an entire region. The conflict has evolved at the hands of political and economic elites, transformed in a society that embraces it as an element of identity, and developed an international character that places it in the midst of polarized global politics. As the roots of the conflict have grown clearer over time, it is also apparent that addressing just the origin of the conflict will no longer be sufficient to bring about resolution. Issues of power, wealth, identity, and influence are interwoven between the elite, society, and international actors. As the conflict has matured and a status quo has solidified, domestic and international actors have maneuvered to manipulate the prevailing structure for their own benefit. Those who benefit from the status quo have created additional layers of intransigence that make the conflict ever more intractable.

Analysis of the conflict as a whole indicates that two conditions must be met simultaneously in order for third party mediation to succeed in bringing about a peaceful resolution. First, both Armenia and Azerbaijan must experience democratic reform that creates transparency in government and empowers civil society to take part in a liberal political process. Second, there must be a shift in the geopolitical balance of power that reduces the influence of bipolar alliances, diminishes Russia's control over Armenia, and provides the conditions in which mediators can cooperate in establishing leverage in mediation. Until these events take place it will be impossible to break the bonds of intractability that keep these two nations entrenched in a frozen conflict.

The prospect of these conditions aligning in the near future is bleak, and it would be safe to assert that the continued longevity of this dispute will be measured in decades rather than years. Certainly one might surmise that the purveyor of any such prediction could have no more political sense than a weatherman in San Diego. One stands a better than average chance of predicting tomorrow's weather in southern California by simply

forecasting the same conditions as today. Nonetheless, this projection is not heedlessly pessimistic; it is based on the complex linkages that have developed between the three prominent levels of this conflict as it has matured. Moreover, conventional approaches to mediation and conflict resolution are principally one-dimensional and shortsighted.

One-dimensional approaches to resolution are typically based on narrow theories of international relations that do not account for all aspects of the conflict. While these theories are sound when analyzed independently, it has been difficult or impossible to develop policy that simultaneously addresses the motivational aspects of all three disparate yet interconnected levels. Specifically, limitations imposed by the structure of the international system create obstacles to overt influence on the elite and national levels by international actors. International mediation is focused on finding a resolution that suits the interests of the states in terms of security, power, and influence. Talk of territorial swaps and peacekeeping forces fit this paradigm. Other approaches have explored resolution at the level of the nation and society and focus on informal diplomacy and the prospect of economic integration. Few options are on the table for international actors to deal with reform at the level of the elite that would not be considered blatantly aggressive. Moreover, the role of the elite in the process has been largely overlooked or misunderstood by international mediators. Due to the interconnectedness of the three prominent levels of the conflict, dealing with any level independently has been obfuscated by its connections to other levels for which a one-dimensional approach is inadequate. Figure 1 outlines the major linkages between the different levels of the conflict that have been described in detail in the preceding chapters.

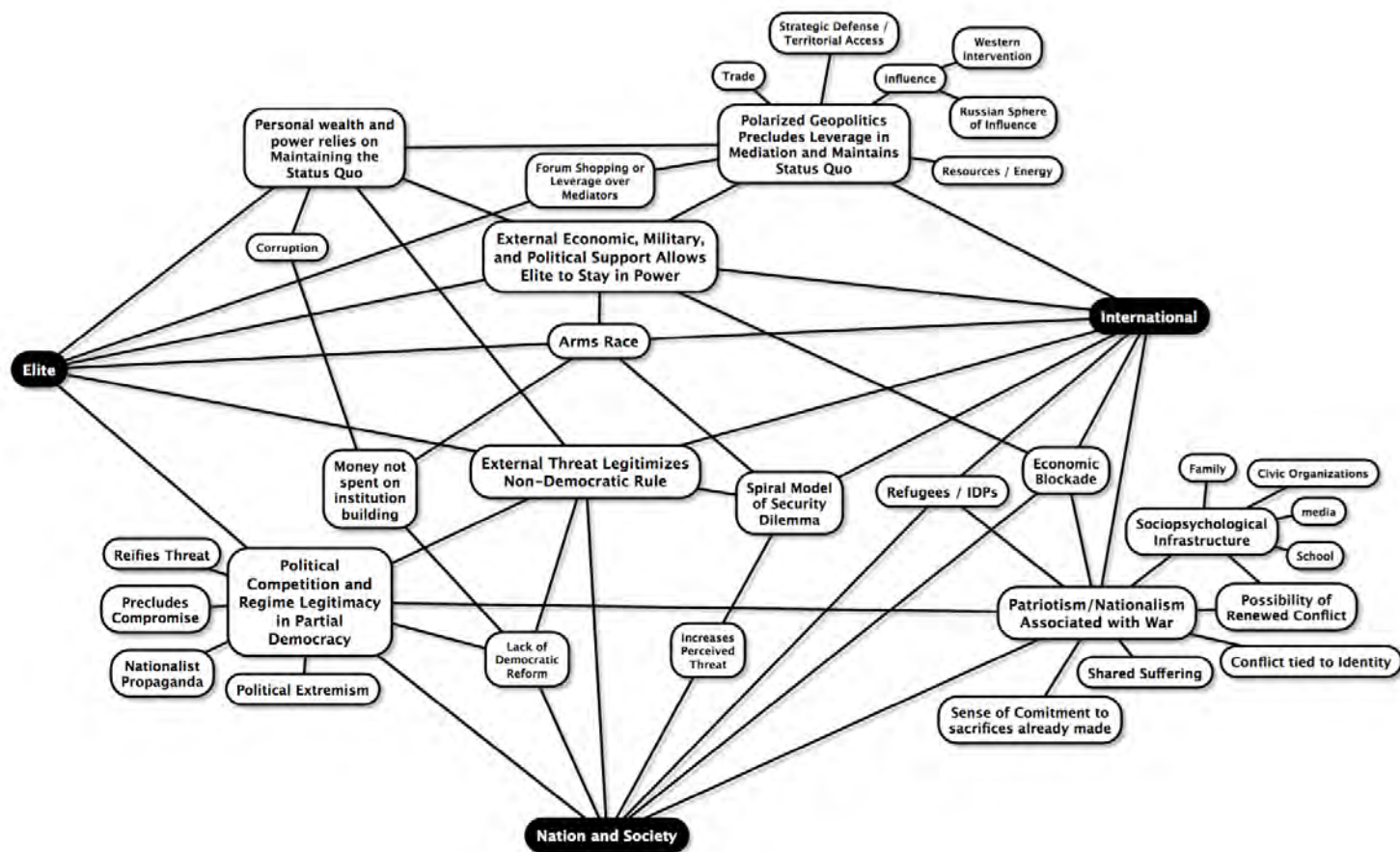


Figure 1. Diagram of linkages between levels of analysis

The introduction to this thesis proposed that the structure that has enveloped this conflict as it matured has created the conditions of intractability that have prevented effective third party mediation. A review of literature on the conflict illustrates the extent to which various scholars focus exclusively on single aspects of the conflict in search of resolution. The numerous perspectives are all uniquely valuable and applicable within the realm of the specific paradigm for which they were written. Nonetheless, when applied to the conflict in all of its complexity, none of them are completely adequate to bring about change.

Three basic paradigms were introduced in chapter two that provide the theoretical background for framing the problem through levels of analysis in terms of the elite, the nation and society, and the international system. The concept of intractability was presented as a condition that can result from a conflict resonating at more than one level. The importance of third party mediation was explained as a historically necessary component in resolving intractable conflicts, as was the difficulty in gaining and maintaining leverage with multiple mediators.

The historical narrative of the conflict in chapter three showed the birth of the conflict on both sides at the levels of the elite, the nation, and the international system. It illustrates how an ethnic conflict based on perceived injustice and insecurity at local levels in society grew to international stature and how elites rose to positions of influence and power. As the war ended in ceasefire in 1994 a basic structure was in place that was reinforced over the following two decades that made the conflict more intractable with time.

Analysis focused on the levels of the elite and the nation, in chapter four, explained the internal structure of the conflict in both Armenia and Azerbaijan and the contemporary linkages between the levels of analysis. Elites in both countries have grown to rely on external threats of the other to maintain legitimacy in their respective partial democracies that hinge on authoritarianism. Political competition takes the form of propaganda and bellicose rhetoric that continues to cement this threat in the minds of their electorate. The arms race that has developed between these two countries reinforces the real threat of war while consuming money and resources that might otherwise be

spent on development in the civil sector, building democratic institutions, and empowering civil society. Society has remained postured for war for so long that militarism is entrenched in the sociopsychological infrastructure of each nation, and the conflict has become part of their respective national identities. The structure of the conflict at the international level thwarts the possibility of peace through economic integration, and the blockade on Armenia contributes to the sense of collective suffering that fuels resentment. Efforts at informal diplomacy gain little ground in an autocratic environment where moderate voices are considered treasonous and government policies prevent freedom of expression. Meanwhile, international actors work within the structure of the status quo to provide the ruling regimes of both nations the support and resources they need to stay in power.

At the international level, as discussed in the last chapter, alliances formed as the status quo solidified such that the structure on the global stage parallels the conflict between these two nations. A bipolar structure, reminiscent of the cold war, has developed where Russia's sphere of influence is matched against western intervention. Azerbaijan is allied with Turkey and shares interests with Europe, the United States, and Israel, while Armenia is critically dependent on support from Russia and Iran. The economic, military, and political support channeled to both conflicting nation supports the interests of larger nations in what amounts to a polarized political skirmish within the larger geopolitical competition. By virtue of proximity, Russia's stronger geopolitical interests have not only hampered resolution, it has strengthened the status quo and fueled the conflict in order to maintain its regional influence.

Mediation has not failed due to a flawed approach or lack of involvement by mediators. Mediation has failed because of the self-reinforcing structure of the status quo that has developed out of the conflict. At the international level this is characterized by competition among mediators and would-be mediators for power, wealth, and regional influence, but it goes deeper than the international level. Each of the three levels of this conflict reinforces the others. Attempting to resolve the dispute at one level only creates greater pressure from the other two levels to restore the balance. Moreover, the process

of third party mediation is limited in influence to the international level and does not affect the majority of the issues at hand. In the current environment there is nothing more an international mediator can do to bring about peace.

Mediators who maintain a dialogue between these two nations have been successful only in their ability to prevent another war, which in itself is a worthy accomplishment. Despite their conflicting regional aspirations and their individual gains from maintaining the status quo, neighboring countries still want to prevent another war. Even Russia, with its dominating strategy of maintaining regional supremacy by controlling the conflict, has considered the strategic balance of power between these two nations in all of its dealings. Russia has long recognized the intractability of the conflict and rather than expending resources to bring about peace has instead chosen to capitalize on the conflict for its own interests. The problem lies in the tyranny of small decisions discussed in Chapter II. International actors each make a series of small decisions based on their own short-term interests regarding power and security that create obstacles to further resolution and create conditions in which the conflict could again erupt in war. The forum for mediation itself has become a series of small decisions that have cumulatively contributed to continued intractability.

Continuing mediation under the conditions of the current status quo is a double-edged sword that no mediator can back away from. Crocker, Hampson, and Aall acknowledge that “mediation will not flourish in an environment where the major powers—for understandable and strategically cogent reasons—have other priorities.”³⁶¹ Mediators engage in mediation for their own national interests, but in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh these interests hinge largely on the realist principle of relative gains. The underlying national interests of opposing mediators relates directly to maintaining influence at the expense of the other in what amounts to a zero-sum equation. In essence, the mediation process is simply a continuation of the conflict on another stage. Under these conditions, the parties to the conflict have the upper hand in the mediation process and mediators cannot gain the leverage required to make progress. Meanwhile,

³⁶¹ Crocker, Hampson, and Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts*, 33.

mediation has continued on the surface for decades with no chance of success. Proposals are made and summarily discarded, political capital is wasted, diplomatic bridges are built only to be set ablaze before the next round of talks, and the media cycle is an eternal rerun. One course of action in such circumstances might be to let the talks cool and preserve mediation for a time when conditions are ripe. Of course, this would require collective action at a global scale. It would require all major international players to forsake their strategic interests in this region until both sides are willing to compromise. Moreover, Russia's role in Armenia is currently a significant balancing force that if removed could tip the balance of power and lead to aggression from Azerbaijan. Crocker, Hampson, and Aall contend that suspending mediation can only be effective if the mediator has substantial leverage over both sides.³⁶² Nonetheless, as mediation continues it grows stale and increasingly ineffective at performing its intended function. Continued open resistance to compromise in international mediation resonates at the national level and has developed a pattern that is now virtually impossible to break.

As discussed in chapters four and five, mediation plays an important part in conflict management even though it has not been able to narrow the gap between the two national positions. The political outlet and international audience that mediation provides has so far been sufficient to supplant military maneuvering with political posturing and provide a notional path toward peace. Mediation is bound to continue for the aforementioned reasons, but there remains some latitude for mediators to determine their level of involvement. In the interest of protecting the sanctity of the mediation process and reestablishing credibility among mediators, it is critical that a careful balance be maintained in which the level of mediator commitment is strictly limited to that which is required to keep all participants at the table and prevent escalation of hostilities. Under the current geopolitical conditions and the sociopolitical environment in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, there should be no real expectation that mediation will yield resolution. There will come a day when conditions are right for meaningful mediation, but if the tools of diplomacy are dulled through improper use they will be unable to perform their functions when it is most critical.

³⁶² Ibid., 125.

The principles of liberal democracy will be the foundation upon which a lasting peace will one day be constructed. Therefore, responsible international actors must prioritize democratic reform and conformity with international norms over continued attempts to find a short-term solution through continued rounds of mediation. Incentives must be developed that tie the short-term interests of both nations to their long-term progress along a path toward democracy. The challenge presented to strategists and policy makers in the years and decades ahead should be to develop a series of incentivized steps for each nation that can provide the conditions suitable for the development of a civil society in which moderate voices can be heard. Such a program must be a coherent plan rather than a series of isolated ad hoc policies, and it must be gradual and subtle enough not to upset the perceived interests of other nations. This will not be an easy task, but its contribution to lasting peace will be far more substantial than what has been seen in the last 20 years.

In seeking resolution to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the international community must raise its eyes to the horizon. There is no short or medium-term solution to this dispute, and pretending to look for one only lends credibility to the claims of both sides. If the last 20 years have taught the people of both nations anything, it is that the status quo is survivable. It is survivable because it is supported by an ideology that feeds on fear and suffering. It is survivable because those in power can stay in power through repression and support of the international community. It survives at the international level because of conflicting national interests tied to the land upon which it rests or the resources therein. Both democratic reform and a geopolitical shift in the balance of power must take place before mediation will be effective, but democratic reform is measured in generations while changes in geopolitical power can occur rapidly. Peace in this region requires that groundwork be laid well in advance and the tools of diplomacy be kept in working order so that when conditions are favorable a solution of compromise is possible.

APPENDIX REGIONAL MAPS

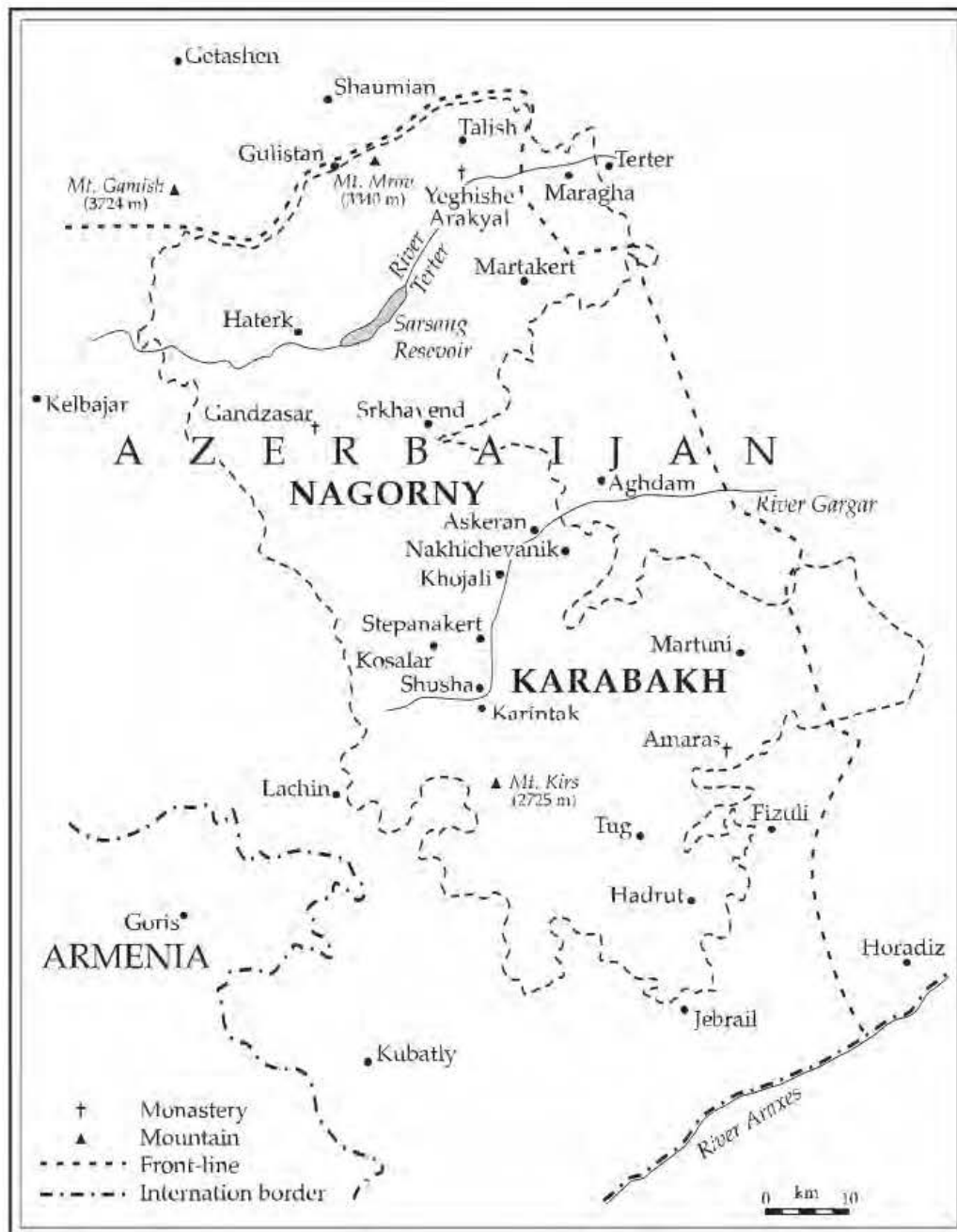


Figure 2. Map of Nagorno-Karabakh³⁶³

³⁶³ de Waal, *Black Garden*, xiii



Figure 3. Map of South Caucasus³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴Ibid., xii

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